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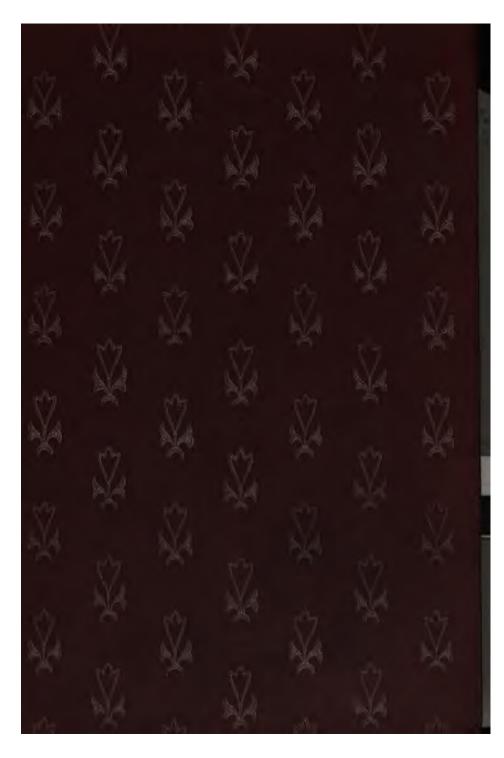
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DONNA QUIXOTE

BY

JUSTIN MCCARTHY, M.P.

AUTHOR OF

'DEAR LADY DISDAIN' 'MISS MISANTHROPE' ETC



IN THREE VOLUMES VOL. III.



With TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS by ARTHUR HOPKINS

SECOND EDITION

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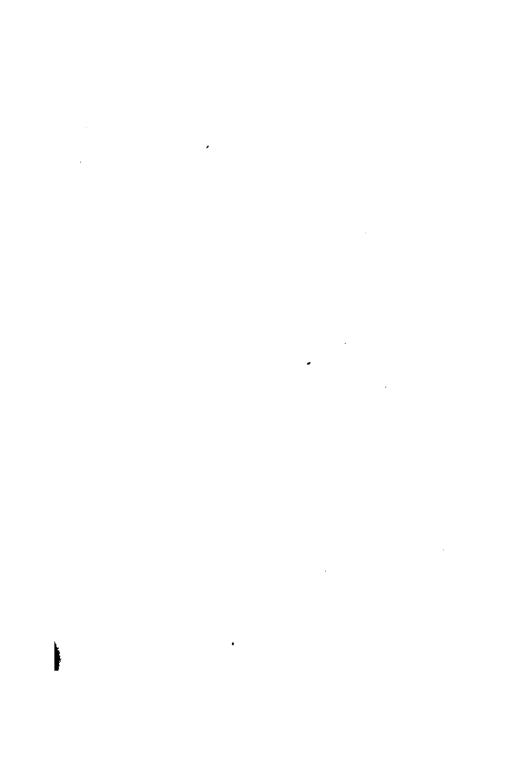
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DONNA QUIXOTE.

CHAPTER I.

GABRIELLE.

MRS. LEVEN was in a specially anxious mood when she went to see Gabrielle on the day of Sir Wilberforce's visit and of his brother's abrupt dismissal. The two brothers had been early visitors that day, and Mrs. Leven arrived long after both had gone. She had heard from Major Leven something about Sir Wilberforce's views with regard to Gabrielle. Indeed, anyone might have guessed from the frequency of his visits to Gabrielle what his views were. There was not much of the crafty diplomatist about Wilberforce, and his attentions to Gabrielle had become so marked of late that anybody but Gabrielle herself must have understood their significance. She had not understood

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it, or thought anything about it. To her he seemed simply a kind goodhearted friend who might almost have been her father. But to Mrs. Leven he seemed still a sort of young man; and of course she assumed that he was certain to marry some time or other. Therefore she had a strong conviction that before long he would be found opening his mind to Gabrielle, and she was anxious to anticipate him if she could. She wanted Gabrielle to know at once that if Sir Wilberforce should ask her to marry him, she, Mrs. Leven, Gabrielle's protectress, friend, and mother, was of opinion the offer should be accepted. Mrs. Leven thought the position, the name, the respectability of character, the British strength of Sir Wilberforce would be the best shelter for Gabrielle's impulsive life.

Mrs. Leven had forgotten her elder son in her love for the more dutiful younger. She was now like to forget Albert in the renewed affection she had for Albert's widow. She often argued gently with Gabrielle on the unwisdom of keeping up the memorial chamber to Albert's name, and pointed out that she herself in all her grief, whereof the grief of forty

thousand widows could not make up the sum, had never maintained any such monument. She was for Gabrielle now going freely out to meet the world, and bringing the world as much as possible to her. After a while she began to go further yet, and to hint to Gabrielle that it was absurd and impossible to continue in her resolution not to get married again. truth Mrs. Leven had now set her heart on the marriage of Gabrielle to Sir Wilberforce Fielding. He was a Baronet; he was very rich; and as he was not a young man he could not be supposed to come into any sort of comparison with the dead Albert. Everyone would know that Gabrielle did not marry him for love; and there would be no slight to the memory of Mrs. Leven's son. By refusing Walter Taxal, who was young and good-looking, and the son of a peer, Gabrielle had sufficiently acknowledged what was due to the memory of Albert Vanthorpe. Mrs. Leven therefore thought that all the proprieties justified her in hoping to see her daughter, as she now once more called her, converted from Mrs. Albert Vanthorpe into Lady Fielding.

'Gabrielle, my love, you look quite pale. You seem to me to be very unwell. What is the matter, dearest child?'

Mrs. Leven sat beside Gabrielle on a sofa, and drew the girl towards her, and put her arm round her neck, and petted her as in the old days. But Gabrielle could not warm, somehow, with the old affection. She bore the petting patiently; she did not delight in it.

- 'I am very well, dear,' Gabrielle said. 'Nothing ever happens to me; I am shockingly uninteresting; I never feel ill.'
- 'Your life is too lonely, dearest. You can't live this way always. Your friends all say so. You may well believe that my advice on such a subject is sincere.'
- 'On what subject, dear?' Gabrielle asked rather languidly. She had not been following very clearly what Mrs. Leven was saying with a sort of mystical earnestness.
- 'Your kind of life, dear girl. It is too lonely for one so young. We all feel it. Major Leven thinks so; and so does Sir Wilberforce Fielding.'

Gabrielle started so palpably at the mention of this name that the thrill passed through Mrs. Leven too; and Mrs. Leven at once assumed that something had happened.

- 'You start at his name, my Gabrielle. Has Sir Wilberforce been here lately?'
- 'He was here this morning,' Gabrielle said, in the tone of one from whom a painful confession is extorted. 'He has not gone very long.'
- 'Oh!' Then there was a moment's pause. The silence satisfied Mrs. Leven that something had come of the visit.
- 'Gabrielle, my love, am I right in supposing that Sir Wilberforce came to-day with a particular purpose? There is no breach of confidence, darling; I speak with you as if I were your mother. No one could object to your telling me.'
- 'There is no secret about it, I suppose,' Gabrielle said, 'to you at least. Sir Wilberforce has been very kind and good; I am sure I am greatly obliged, or I ought to be.'
 - 'Yes, dearest? well?'
 - 'Oh, you can guess, dear,' Gabrielle said wearily.

'You have guessed already, I am sure. Sir Wilberforce asked me to marry him.'

There was another pause. Gabrielle apparently was not going to say any more on the subject.

- 'Well, dearest?'
- 'Well, Mrs. Leven, that is the whole story.'
- 'Gabrielle, how can you speak to me coldly as "Mrs. Leven"? We have forgotten all our old anger——'
- 'I never felt any anger to you,' said Gabrielle truly.
- 'You are a sweet girl; so sweet and good that you could forgive even a little unreasoning anger in one of a warmer temper. But I want to hear more from you about this. Sir Wilberforce asked you to be his wife. What did you say, dearest?'
 - 'What could I say? I told him it was impossible.'
 - 'Yes? Did he accept that answer?'
- 'He did. What else could he do? It was very kind of him, and all that, I suppose; but he might have known.'
- 'But, dearest Gabrielle, you can't remain all your life in this lonely way. It is impossible, my dear

ehild. You are too young and too pretty. I really don't think you could do better than to marry Sir Wilberforce. I don't indeed. Perhaps, however, he does not take your answer as quite final? Nineteen nay-says make one grant, it used to be said in my younger days.'

'They will never make a grant in my case. Sir Wilberforce knows that perfectly well. He is too kind and good to say any more to me about it, when he knows how I feel.'

'You told him you were resolved never to marry again? He wouldn't much mind that, Gabrielle. Young women always say such things as that; and believe them too. I was convinced at one time I never would marry again.'

'I told him that my present resolve was not to marry again. But I told him also that I never could feel to him as I should feel to a man I could marry. I don't care about him in that way at all.'

'He is not young,' Mrs. Leven said meditatively; but he is not old, Gabrielle; and often there is more congeniality in a man of that age. You have grown to be a grave sort of girl, Gabrielle; you would not find him too old in manner, I fancy.'

- 'It is not that. I like him very much; I like him as a friend all the better because he isn't young; but I never could like him to marry him.'
- 'But Walter Taxal is young; and you didn't like him well enough to marry him?'

Gabrielle had not supposed that Mrs. Leven knew anything about Walter Taxal's love-making. But she expressed no wonder.

- 'I like Walter Taxal very much; but not in that way. I could not marry him. But I don't want to marry anyone.'
- 'Gabrielle,' Mrs. Leven said suddenly, 'did Sir Wilberforce ask you if there was anyone you preferred to him?'
- 'He did not ask me anything of the kind. If he had, I would not have answered him. But he is far too courteous and gentle to ask such a question.'
- 'There is such a person!' Mrs. Leven made up her mind at once; and in a moment it was borne in upon her that some slight to the memory of Albert Vanthorpe was intended.

- 'How unlike Sir Wilberforce is to his brother!' she said.
 - 'Very unlike,' Gabrielle said.
 - 'You don't like the brother, I am sure, Gabrielle?'
 - 'Oh, yes; I like him very much.'
 - 'But don't people say strange things about him?'
- 'They do, very strange things; and yet they are quite true. They say that he is very generous and truthful and kind; and that he does not care in the least for money or society or getting on in life, and that he hasn't anything mean in him—and other strange things like that.'
- 'I didn't mean exactly that. A man is often very free of his money, and careless about money; and young men often fancy they don't care about getting on in life—we know all that sort of thing well enough. But a man may be very wild and bad for all that.'
- 'I never heard anyone say anything bad about Mr. Fielding,' said Gabrielle, withdrawing herself gently and almost imperceptibly from Mrs. Leven's closer embrace.
- 'Oh, yes, Gabrielle dearest, you must surely have heard things said of him. He was very wild, and he

ran away from his father's house early in life; and I believe he broke his father's heart. He was a friend of my unfortunate son Philip; and I have no doubt he was just such another. I sometimes even think he looks like him—as Philip would look now if he were living. Do you know that, much as I respect Sir Wilberforce, I cannot help feeling a sort of shudder pass through me when I see his brother here under my Albert's roof!'

Under my Albert's roof! Gabrielle felt an angry glow rise to her face at the words. But she did not give any expression to her thoughts. She would not enter into any controversy with Mrs. Leven. She had seldom much control over her resolves and her impulses; but she could command her words and her temper. No temptation could draw her into any dispute with Albert Vanthorpe's mother. Mrs. Leven now again often thought Gabrielle docile and malleable when she was only patient and silent.

But Gabrielle's mind was made up. 'I shall never be free,' she thought, 'as long as I live in this house and live on poor Albert's money. I am sold into servitude so long as I live in this sort of way. I have no freedom; at any moment I am liable to be asked to give account of whom I admit into Albert Vanthorpe's house, and what use I make of his money. I don't want the house or the money; and I don't know how to make any really good use of money. I have enough of my own to live on, and I want no more. I hate this servitude; I'll not endure it; I will be free!'

Mrs. Leven returned home much distressed in mind. Gabrielle had determined not to marry Sir Wilberforce, and it was much to be feared had been taken by the handsome and good-for-nothing brother, whom Mrs. Leven had from the first disliked and distrusted. The aggrieved lady felt almost in a mood to proclaim herself an infidel, seeing how things were turning out.

The moment Mrs. Leven had gone, Gabrielle hurried to take counsel of Lady Honeybell. She plunged into the matter abruptly.

- 'Lady Honeybell, how can I get rid of money?'
- 'Get rid of money, my dear? eh, but that's rather an odd question. I never heard of anyone having the slightest difficulty about getting rid of it, except

perhaps the man in the story about the bottle imp-what was it?'

'But I don't mean getting rid of it by spending or wasting it. I want it to do some good to somebody. I only want to be rid of it myself. I have money that I don't intend to keep any longer. I hate the thought of having it. What am I to do with it?'

- 'You are serious in this?'
- 'Oh, yes, Lady Honeybell, quite serious.'
- 'Tell me all about it; begin at the beginning.'

Nothing could be more friendly and reassuring than Lady Honeybell's way. It showed Gabrielle that the good woman was prepared to treat her not as a child or an idiot, and to enter into the conversation on the basis of an admission that there might be possessions dearer than money. Gabrielle told her the whole story, except, of course, what concerned the two Fieldings. Lady Honeybell listened in silence until the tale had evidently come to an end. Perhaps she was expecting to hear something more.

'Why don't you ask Mrs. Leven to take her son's property off your hands, since you don't like the trouble of it?'

- 'She wouldn't take it, Lady Honeybell. She is too proud; and she has money of her own, and she is not a woman to grasp at money.'
- 'Then why don't you keep it yourself, and make the best use you can of it, since she doesn't think herself wronged by your having it?'
- 'Because I want to be free. I want to feel that I can do as I think right without having it made a reproach to me by poor Albert's mother that I am living on his money.'
- 'In plain words, you want to do something that you think she will not like.'
- 'I want to be free,' said Gabrielle firmly. 'Free to do what I think right.'
- 'Yes, yes,' Lady Honeybell said, good-humouredly. 'We mean the same thing, no doubt. He is as proud as yourself, I suppose? Well, you needn't blush, and I don't ask you to tell me any secrets; but, of course, my dear young woman, I can see that there is a he in the business, and that he is somebody Mrs. Leven doesn't much like, and that he is a man of spirit who does not want to take a wife with a burden of money.'

'Lady Honeybell, I have never spoken to any man about this; nor to any woman either, but yourself.'

'No, no; but there is a man all the same. Well, I think on the whole you are right; and I respect your way of looking at the matter. I can promise you that I will think it over, and I'll ask my husband—not mentioning your name, of course. You must be prepared for everyone thinking you a fool; but I suppose you don't care about that.'

'Oh no, Lady Honeybell, not in the least.'

Lady Honeybell smiled at the quiet self-containment of the reply.

'But you won't be quite poor, I suppose, even after this sacrifice? Poverty's an awful thing, I fancy, for all that they say in the story-books.'

'I shall have enough to live on,' Gabrielle said. 'I shall have what I lived on before I became poor Albert's widow. I was always very happy then, Lady Honeybell. There are people who do not care about money, and I am one of them. I had an idea at one time that I might do a great deal of good somehow, and make many people happy; but I don't think I

made much of a success of it, and I am not equal to the responsibility.'

- 'You are too young,' Lady Honeybell said, nodding her head. 'Too young, and that's the truth of it, to live alone, and make up plans for the good of your fellow-creatures. But I'll tell you what you can do; I thought it from the first time I saw you, and I think it more than ever now.'
 - 'Yes, Lady Honeybell, what is that?'
- 'You can make one man happy. There's your mission for you, Gabrielle, my dear. I call you by your name, for I like you. I am only afraid it won't be the man that I would name if I had the chance. I wish I had a son, and that you would marry him.'

Gabrielle neither denied nor admitted the truth of Lady Honeybell's conjecture. She would have scorned the meanness that denies a purpose which one secretly cherishes, merely because it is only a purpose, and may never have a chance of being realised. Lady Honeybell promised to help her all she could to come to some wise disposal of poor Albert's property. Lady Honeybell felt her estimate of Gabrielle much enhanced by what she heard. 'Eh, true enough, money

isn't everything,' she said to herself. Her thoughts went back to a time long before she had any idea of being the wife of the Earl of Honeybell, and to a young man with whom she had some romantic passages, when all the world was young, and he and she were the very youngest of all. She would gladly have married him, if only her people would listen to the doctrine that money is not everything. An excellent man, truly, was Lord Honeybell, although he took little interest in his wife's occupations and amusements; but Lady Honeybell knew now by experience that money is not all—not nearly all, perhaps, if one would only think it.

It was with a bursting heart that Gabrielle returned to the home which she meant to be hers no longer. Her mind was made up; the die was cast. Nothing on earth should induce her to live in that house and on the money of Albert Vanthorpe. She thought with humiliation of the sort of servitude which seemed to be morally imposed upon her by the possession of money which she had never coveted. She longed to feel herself free again. But as she passed up the stairs of the house which had been found for her and fitted up so lovingly for her by tender hands, she could not

help feeling touched by the thought that she had to sever herself from the memories, or at least from the monuments, of that deep disinterested affection. A new life was all before her; for the third time in her short days, she was to begin all over again. thought made every step she set on the stairs of her present home seem like a farewell. She spoke to no one, but went slowly to the familiar room where she had seen Fielding that morning; where she had spoken with Wilberforce later still. As she reached its threshold she was thinking of this and of other memorable interviews she had had in the same room, with the portrait of Albert Vanthorpe looking on, 'Something strange is always happening to me in this room,' she thought. 'Soon I shall not see it any There are some memories of it that I shall always love.'

The dusk was gathering, and the room was dim. The lamps were not yet lighted; she could scarcely discern objects around. As she approached the chimney-piece she could see that the picture of Albert Vanthorpe was in its place. It looked now a mere dark slab against the dusk. Her eyes were attracted

by it and were fixed upon it; there was something ominous and reproachful about its presence, and about the manner in which it had fixed her attention the moment she entered the room.'

'Gabrielle!' The word came in a low, thrilling tone from somewhere between her and the picture. She stood still, but she did not scream. 'Gabrielle!' And then she saw a figure rise from the ground—it almost seemed as if it might have come out of the ground before her—and she was aware of the presence of Clarkson Fielding.

'Oh, how did you come here?' she asked breathlessly.

'I came to see you; I knew you would return soon. I stole in here like a thief in the night, and lay on the hearth until I heard you come in. I wanted to see you alone, Gabrielle.'

'But if anyone had come in and seen you?' she said, hardly knowing what she was saying, and only feeling sure that her heart was beating loudly.

'I didn't care; I must see you; and I lay on the hearth in token of humiliation; for I must have offended you in some way to-day. There, you are tired,

or I have frightened you. Sit here; no, here, on the sofa, and I will lie at your feet.'

His manner of submissive domination overmastered her. She sat on the sofa as he bade her; and he actually threw himself on the ground at her feet. He took her hand, and she did not resist. There was a moment of silence.

- 'You have forgiven me?' he said, turning his head round towards her; 'and you will tell me why you were angry with me to-day, Gabrielle?'
- 'Because I humbled myself as no woman ought to do, and you seemed ashamed to meet your brother's eyes. What wrong had I done to your brother? what had I to be ashamed of?'
- 'Oh, no, not you, but I; at least, I felt so for the moment. Look here, Gabrielle, listen. He told me again and again how fond he was of you; he told me he was going to ask you to marry him. You know how good, and kind, and brotherly—more than brotherly—he has been to me. How could I help feeling afraid to look him in the face, and confess that I had come between him and his hopes? If I had ever known, or ever thought or suspected, or anything—but how could

I suspect? How could I think a woman like you could care about a ne'er-do-well like me? Why, I remember once saying that if you would only have the goodness to trample on me, I should be only too happy. Good heavens! how could I fancy that you would care about me? I should never have believed it, if you had not told me yourself.'

- 'I don't know why I told you,' Gabrielle said; but I could not help it then, and I felt that it was right at the time. Why should I allow you to go away from England, if—if that was all?'
- 'Ay, why indeed, why indeed? But I never dreamed of such a thing, Gabrielle. I thought you would very likely marry my brother; and, much as I love Wilberforce now, I could not stay and see that. Can you wonder if I was afraid to meet him? I have taken you from him; he may even think I was treacherous to him, and deceived him. You can under stand this, Gabrielle, Gabrielle?' He seemed to take a delight in the mere repeating of her name. 'You forgive me, Gabrielle?'
- 'Yes,' she said. 'I felt bitter at the moment. I think I was angry with myself more than with you;

but I understand now better, and I know it must be a trying thing to you to have to meet your brother. But you will tell him all the truth, just as it is; and he will believe you. He is so loyal and true himself.'

'And you do care for me, Gabrielle?' He sank his voice into a wonderful softness of tone. 'You love me?'

'Oh yes, I said that before. Nothing can change that.' She felt him press her hand to his lips. There was a moment's silence. She was glad that the dusk was deepening, so that even her lover could not see her face.

'Now,' she said, 'you must go. You must leave me, for this time. We can see each other soon again; very soon. I will write. Is not that the best way? But this is all so strange now, everything in the world seems changed. Yow must give me time to collect my senses. You will go—my friend?'

She did not know yet by what name to call him. It was all too new and sudden for her to venture on a tenderer word. But her tremulous voice gave an unspeakable tenderness to the word; and he was satisfied.

'Yes; I will go,' he said. 'I will steal out as I

I should not like this first time to leave you as a common visitor does. I came like a lover, and I will go away like a lover; and so good-bye, Gabrielle. He drew her down towards him, as he still reclined on the floor at her feet; and she felt his lips press hers. And then he leaped lightly to his feet, and vanished, as it were, in the dusk. He had come as a lover in a sort of romantic secrecy; and he had gone as a lover should go. Gabrielle sat in the soft gloom of the evening, and felt that if 'twere now to die 'twere now to be most happy. All her life before had seemed lonely and bare, a mere dull mistake, until this moment. 'Is it possible,' she thought, 'that this can last; that happiness like this moment's is not to be paid for by some misfortune?' There came strangely across her mind the saying of some saint: 'Truly the damned ones are miserable, for they cannot love.'

Then she rang for lights, and tried to look and feel like some commonplace person to whom nothing in particular has happened.

CHAPTER II.

'WHEN FALLS THE MODEST GLOAMING.'

The two Scottish poets, Burns and Hogg, have dealt with the same text in the poem of each which sings of the love who is 'but a lassie yet.' The lover pictured by the Ettrick Shepherd is in very ecstasy of happiness, and in the highest mood of human confidence. Nothing can be less than sacred for him which has been touched, or praised, or looked on by his love 'who's but a lassie yet.' The stream so glassy, the modest gloaming, the birds that sing, the grass that grows green around the feet of the loved one, the very wind that kisses her, the flowery beds on which she treads—all come in for the poet's love and praise. How otherwise is it with Burns's disappointed hero! This lover has been hardly entreated by his love 'who's but a lassie yet.' He only thinks of letting her stand a year

or two in the hope that she will not then be quite so saucy; he declares that no one can woo her; man can only buy her. He vows that the real joy of man is a drop o' the best o't—being for the moment in the mood of the author of the Vaux de Vire, who finds easy consolation in wine when the scornful girl rejects his petition for a kiss; and, finally, in a wild burst of cynicism, worthy of Villon himself, he goes off into an utterly irrelevant remark about a minister who made love to a fiddler's wife and could not preach for thinking of her charms.

Clarkson Fielding was in the full mood of the happy lover. But he was also in a condition of much distress for the unhappy one who might, for all he knew, be in such state as Burns has described. The one sole drawback to his happiness was his knowledge that the same event which filled him with joy must have dashed the hopes of his brother to the ground. He wrote to Wilberforce at once, a short frank letter of explanation, in which he told how the knowledge of his great happiness had come on him wholly by surprise, and how when Wilberforce talked of asking Gabrielle to marry him, 'it never occurred to my mind that she

could possibly care for me.' 'I was determined not to say a word about it,' he wrote; 'I was going away for that reason alone, because I did not like to disturb your happiness by allowing you to know that I was unhappy. I was in love with her, Wilberforce, before you ever saw her, and I can't deny good fortune more than bad. What I thought was my case has come to be your case, and if I am happy I still can feel sorry that you are disappointed. Is it my fault if we have both set our hearts on the one woman, and my good fortune is your disappointment?' Wilberforce replied at once:

'My dear Clarkson, how could she help liking you better? You are young and good-looking; and I only wonder the thing never occurred to me before. I shall get over my disappointment, and be able to congratulate you both very soon, I hope. Tell her so from me, and wish her every happiness; and the same to you, Clarkson, from

'Your affectionate brother,

WILBERFORCE.

Fielding read these few direct and manly words with a certain sense of relief. 'He could not have loved her as I do; and he will get over it. I should not have got over it.' He said as much to Gabrielle.

'Oh, no,' she said, 'your brother is not by any means broken-hearted. He didn't even say he was—when I saw him. I think if he had known, he would have made an offer on your behalf as the next best thing. I have no scruples of conscience and no remorse on his account. I shall be very fond of him as a brother-in-law.'

'There is one thing that troubles me,' Fielding said, after a moment's pause; 'and only one thing in the world, now that we have reconciled our consciences about poor Wilberforce.'

- 'What is your trouble. Is it anything I can help you to get rid of?'
 - 'Yes; it is all in your hands.'
 - 'Ah, then it is done with,' she said. 'Tell me.'
- 'I find it hard to come at it. It's about money, and that sort of thing; and I hate even to mention the name of money to you just now. Well, it's this—I don't want a wife with money. I want

you; but not your money. Come, now, I have got that out.'

- 'You mean the money that is not mine—that was given to me—that is the money you speak of?'
 - 'Yes, that is it; I hate the idea, Gabrielle.'
- 'I knew you would think so; and I have already done as you would have me to do. I am coming to you free of encumbrance.' Then she told him what she had resolved on doing, and that she had been in counsel with Lady Honeybell, and that the only question now was how to turn poor Albert Vanthorpe's money to some good account whereby some human creatures should be the better for it.
- 'The dreams I used to have!' Gabrielle said. 'The wonderful things I was to do for all manner of people! The life of lonely beneficence I was to lead! And this is how it all ends; I meet you and I fall in love—first love, just like a school-girl!'
 - 'You are not sorry, Gabrielle?'
 - 'I never before was happy.'

Fielding was silent for a moment. He was filled with new admiration for her and with gratitude, because of the manner in which she had anticipated his inmost feelings with regard to poor Albert's money. 'True and noble heart!' he thought.

- 'Some of your friends will blame you greatly, Gabrielle.'
 - 'Oh, yes; I know. I have thought of all that.'
 - 'They will say all manner of hard things of me.'
 - 'I suppose so; I shall not believe them.'

For Fielding could not help fearing that there would be persons found to make the worst of his wild life, in order to alarm Gabrielle, and make her think perhaps that she was venturing too much in trusting her happiness to him. His life had been a wild one in the strict sense; but not quite according to the conventional meaning of the word. It had been a life of bold and harmless wandering. It could not fairly be called an eccentric life; at least, it had not strayed far from the central principle which Fielding set up for himself. There was some practical philosophy in it. At a very early age Fielding had made up his mind, according to the phrase of a thoughtful writer of our time, as to what the world—the world of society was worth to him. He found that it was worthnothing; and he acted accordingly. He set himself

absolutely free. But that he loved Gabrielle so much now he would never have thought of giving up his unhoused free condition. But it is the fault of the story-teller if the reader has not seen even from the very first that there was a depth of fresh and almost boyish yearning in the young man for the sweet and close companionship of some loving nature. He could not have loved Gabrielle if she had not been of his own turn of mind with regard to society, and the delight of getting on in the world. There really did seem a great deal that was alike in these two, this odd young man and odd young woman, who were not anxious about money and did not care what society said about anything. As the homely old saying would have put the thing, it would be a pity to spoil two houses with such a pair.

A measureless content had settled upon Fielding. His peculiar life had taught him one thing at least—he knew perfectly well what he liked and what he did not like, and not only what he liked and disliked to-day, but what he must like and dislike to-morrow. knew that he must always love Gabrielle, and that her companionship would be worth all the world to him.

He had not the faintest idea of his possibly changing to her or of her changing to him. He would pull himself together now, he said, and do something; and he meant just what he said. He had money enough to start with, and it was only a question of where Gabrielle would like to go, and what sort of life they had best lead. He had chafed a little, at first, at the thought of his being supposed to come in for Albert Vanthorpe's money; but Gabrielle had settled all that, and he only wondered now that he did not know from the first that she would settle it. He felt perfectly happy and confident. The future looked as if it were steeped in sunshine; but the present was so sunny too that he did not long for it to hurry on even for the sake of the coming and dearer time. He was proud of his beautiful Gabrielle, and of her wild-falcon ways, which would stoop to no hand but his. If ever a lover, since love began on earth, was loved for himself alone, he surely thought he, Clarkson Fielding, was that happy man.

'I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I did till we loved?' The sweet strong words of the poet often came up to the mind of Fielding, and might have come

up to the mind of Gabrielle too if she had read Dr. Donne. What had life been before to either of them? What had it been all about? What had there been to live for till now? Gabrielle, in particular, looked back upon her past existence with wonder and compassion. This feeling of love was the one thing she had always wanted. She had missed it, not knowing what it was she missed. She was so happy now that she sometimes became sad for very happiness; sad through the fear that such a happiness could not last. The gods in the fable which Socrates invented for Æsop made pain and pleasure to spring from one head, so that man can hardly touch the one without coming into some contact with the other. Gabrielle was still romantic enough to fancy sometimes that she should like nothing better than for Fielding and herself to die together. She thought Byron's Myrrha a most enviable creature, to die thus gloriously with her lover, and see no more of the pettinesses and paltrinesses of life. The idea sometimes possessed her to an almost morbid degree. She dreaded any possibility of some influence coming between Fielding and her, and parting them. She shrank from the thought that one day

she must grow old, and lose whatever charm of face and form she had, and not be lovely in his eyes, however she might be dear to his heart. Strange to sav. love began to inspire Gabrielle, for the first time in her life, with something like self-consciousness and vanity. Truly it was a very harmless vanity; the immemorial fond desire of the girl to look beautiful in her lover's But it made a difference to Gabrielle. found herself studying her face in the glass, and considering her features, and the arrangement of her hair, and wondering whether she looked better in this dress or the other, in this colour or in that; and sometimes beginning to doubt whether she really had any good looks at all; and then reassuring herself with the conviction that Fielding loved her whether or not; and then again yielding to a growing belief that she must, on the whole, be rather good-looking than otherwise. All this time Fielding never once paid her a direct compliment. His love and his ways were compliment enough. He thought her beautiful, and he knew that she knew what he thought.

They met still, as he had put it, after the fashion of lovers. Every evening, as the dusk was coming on,

Fielding was with her. Every evening, before the lamps were lighted, he went away. It was not fitting just yet that he should be much with her, or put on the ways of an accepted lover. So he still came to see her. as the young Spartan lovers came to visit their brides, in something like stealth and secrecy. They were very sweet, these soft evening hours, when the late summer's sunset slanted for a while through the branches of the trees around Gabrielle's little demesne, and the sound of London life was unheard in that darkling room, and the two were almost as much isolated from ordinary life at the time as Chateaubriand's forest-lovers. The latest carriages had not yet left the Park. The loungers were still there, many groups, many solitary figures; some lounging there because they had nothing else to do, for life came easily to them; others because they had scarcely any other place to go to, life being hard upon them. Fashion and wealth and idlesse were busy in their congenial ways; people were dressing and dining and driving, hurrying to Lords and Commons, and club and opera, and theatre and musichall and pothouse. And our two lovers sat in a darkening room on the edge of one of the Parks which are

centres of life and fashion, and were isolated and happy and self-sufficing as Hermann and Dorothea might have been, or the lone pair in the legend, whose fate it was to discover Madeira.

Perhaps it was because this was all so sweet, romantic, and delightful that Gabrielle seemed to shrink from the remonstrances and expostulations which were sure to pour in on her when their intended marriage should come to be made known to the class of inconvenient creatures whom lovers have to describe as their friends. It was not that Gabrielle cared in the least for what anybody might say, or that her resolve could in any way be affected by it; but she shrank from the profanation of wise people's worldly advices and grating expostulations, and from the very thought of having to stand up for her chosen lover against the accusations of sagacious elders. She knew that she would herself be accused of a want of consistency, of fickleness, and of levity, in consenting to marry so soon after she had declared to more than one that she would never marry again. In her own mind her vindication was clear. 'I never did mean to marry again,' she had said to herself, and to Fielding too sometimes. 'I only cared for one man in all the world, and I didn't think he cared about me. Now I know that he does, and what is there inconsistent in that?' Yet she dreaded the inevitable expostulations all the same, and for the same reason, because they seemed to profane the love which they could not avail to change.

These evenings were not many. They were only a few delightful hours of quiet happiness and undisturbed love before the necessary announcement, to Gabrielle's friends, of the step she was about to take. For a while only Wilberforce knew anything of the truth; and so long as it was to be a secret from the world they knew that it would be safe with him. So they enjoyed in peace their 'modest gloaming,' like the lovers in the Ettrick Shepherd's sweet poem; and if Gabrielle was sometimes tremulous and anxious, it was only because the happiness was all too new to her, and seemed too exquisite to last very long. One evening she asked him abruptly:

- 'Should you like us to die together—now?
- 'Not I,' Fielding answered with unmistakable earnestness. 'I should much rather we lived together.'

- 'But if one of us had to die—would you not be willing to die with me?'
- 'I should be willing to die for you, if that could serve you, Gabrielle; how could I not be willing to die with you? what motive could I have for living without you?'
- 'I grow afraid sometimes,' she said, 'that this cannot last; and then I think that it would be a delightful thing if we were to die at once, you and I, and so make the past secure.'

He looked into her eyes and saw that they were filled with tears. She tried to avoid his look.

'I always thought that love made people brave and strong,' she said, trying to smile through her tears; 'it seems to be making me a very weak and cowardly creature. I was never afraid of anything before, and now I am always in a kind of terror; and I become filled with fancies and omens, and I think I see shadows of coming disappointment in everything. And I never was vain before, or cared whether anyone thought me good-looking or not; and now I find my mind taken up with ideas about whether I look as well to-day as I did yesterday, and all such

I used to be courageous, and not a coward. I used to feel sure that everything would turn out for the best; and now I keep thinking that something must happen to come between us. Shall I never be brave again?'

- 'You will be brave again,' he said, 'the very moment that any occasion comes to call on you for courage.'
- We will go away from England for a while—don't you think?' she said hesitatingly.

He gently assured her that they should go to any part of the world she chose to name, and stay there as long as she wished.

'I feel,' she said, 'as if I should like some soft place with sweet warm air and a sky without winds; and a life not so eager as our English life; and where there were not many people that we knew. I should like to go somewhere on the other side of mountains—don't you understand?—I don't know how to explain it in any other words. Somewhere on the other side of blue mountains,

He understood what she meant. He too began to long to be away anywhere with her, they two alone. When he left her that evening he wandered for long hours, following the river's course, aimlessly, full of his happiness and his love. He often thus rambled away when he had left her one evening and was not to see her until the next. The spirit of unrest seemed to master him when she was not near.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT PEOPLE SAID.

MAJOR LEVEN and his wife had finished breakfast one morning and were alone when Gabrielle Vanthorpe came to see them. She did not often visit them at such an hour; indeed, she had not for some days visited them at all. Mrs. Leven had of late begun to find that somehow or other the old relationships were not renewing themselves. She welcomed Gabrielle's visit now as a good omen.

'I do hope, dearest Gabrielle,' she said effusively, 'that you have come to tell us you have changed your mind, and that you will go with us.'

The Levens were going to the Pyrenees almost immediately. Major Leven was anxious to get away anywhere out of town until Paulina should cease to be a heroine.

- 'Do come with us, Gabrielle,' he said cheerily; 'the trip would do you ever so much good. Don't be afraid of our accusing you of fickleness, because you have changed your mind.'
- 'I wish we could prevail upon you to change it as to another matter too, my Gabrielle,' Mrs. Leven said significantly. 'I saw poor Sir Wilberforce yesterday; he looks quite depressed.'
- 'I haven't changed my mind about the Pyrenees; I can't go,' Gabrielle said. 'But I wanted to talk to you about something else—no, not about Sir Wilberforce.'

At that moment a card was brought to Major Leven, who looked up with some surprise after reading the name and some words written on it.

'Remember the Scottish proverb, Gabrielle,' he said,
'if it is not Bran it is Bran's brother. Here is Bran's brother—I mean Sir Wilberforce's brother—wants to speak with me about something very particular. Don't go until I come back, Gabrielle, my dear; I dare say he will not remain very long.'

Major Leven hastened away to see Bran's brother.

'I wonder what he can want with George,' Mrs.

Leven said; 'I don't like that young man; and I don't think he much likes us.'

'I can tell you what he has to say to Major Leven,' Gabrielle said quietly. 'It is just what I have come to say to you, Mrs. Leven.' She answered a deprecatory gesture at the use of the cold words 'Mrs. Leven' by saying quickly: 'Better hear my story first, and then tell me what to call you. Mr. Fielding and I have the same story to tell; and we came at the same time to tell it.'

Mrs. Leven knew it all now. She furned pale, and her lips trembled.

'Mr. Fielding and I have found out,' Gabrielle went on, growing more and more composed and mistress of herself now that the worst was over, 'that we are very much attached to each other; and we are going to be married. I came to tell you that, Mrs. Leven. I know you won't like it; but I know too that I am doing right. I love him very much, and I think I can make him happy.'

'I never thought to hear you utter such words—never!'

^{&#}x27;Nor I,' said Gabrielle.

- 'I don't understand what you mean, Gabrielle.'
- 'I only mean that this is almost as much of a surprise to me as it can be to you; at least, it was.'
- 'Then do you mean to say that you have really plunged into this insane engagement on the whim of a moment, and without knowing your own mind?'
- 'Oh, no.' Gabrielle felt her colour rising, and her courage too. 'I don't mean anything of the kind. I have known my own mind this long time; I didn't know his mind. That was the surprise.'
 - 'Is this wofnanly, Gabrielle?'
 - 'I think so,' said Gabrielle.

Mrs. Leven remained silent for a moment. She could hardly find suitable words. She could have found strong words enough; but there was something in Gabrielle's quiet self-sustained manner that told her they would be out of place now. The rebellion against old authority was evidently complete.

- 'Gabrielle,' Mrs. Leven began at last, 'your mother was my dearest friend——'
- 'Yes,' Gabrielle said very gently; 'I am glad you remember that.'
 - 'I used to lament for her-now how can I lament

for her any more? What could she have said if she had lived to see this day? What would she have felt?'

'She would have felt happy in her daughter's happiness, I am sure. She would have loved the man I love, for my sake; and when she knew him, for his own.'

'You profane your mother's name, Gabrielle, when you use it in such a way. Why, do you know what manner of man this is—this man that you have allowed to make love to you? or did you make love to him perhaps? Which was it?'

'I think it was one and the other,' Gabrielle answered very composedly. Mrs. Leven seemed to her now so utterly in the wrong, unsympathetic, and unkind, that she really felt no longer anything but an almost contemptuous compassion for her. 'I am sadly afraid I did some of the love-making——'

- 'And you are not ashamed to confess it?'
- 'Oh, no.'

'Have you heard what people say about the sort of life he has led? Do you know that he broke his father's heart?'

- 'I know he did not; I know that his father was in the wrong, and not he ——'
 - 'He says so, I suppose, and you believe it?'
- 'Oh, no, Sir Wilberforce often told me so; he never did.'
 - 'But you must have heard what people say of him?'
- 'I don't know—I may have heard some of it. I don't care what anyone in the world says of him.'
- 'A man of whom you know nothing but that he has the reputation of a vagabond and an outlaw, or something very like it! Why, you don't even knew, Gabrielle, whether he is the person he claims to be or not. How do you know that he is Sir Wilberforce Fielding's brother? Sir Wilberforce says he would never have known him again. There is not the least resemblance between them. You foolish girl, take care what you are doing. I don't believe he is Sir Wilberforce's brother at all—oh, George.'

For Major Leven now came back into the room, looking very grave and gloomy. He glanced at Gabrielle, and then at his wife, and shrugged his shoulders.

'I confess I don't like this business, Gabrielle,' he said. 'I suppose you have been telling Constance?

It is all too sudden; I don't believe you know your own mind. You go on like a romantic girl; you think this young man is a hero of romance, and at war with society, and all that. You will very soon find such dreams won't do for the real world.'

'He has been telling you, I suppose,' Mrs. Leven said—'that young man? He must have some courage, I think.'

"Oh, the young man said what he had to say very well," Major Leven explained, "as far as that goes. I have nothing to say against Mr. Fielding personally. He is a very modest and gentlemanlike young man. I don't blame him for falling in love with our Gabrielle; I dare say he couldn't help himself. But I don't at all like the idea of Gabrielle marrying him. She hasn't known him long; she doesn't know anything about him. He seems to have led a queer wild sort of life, though I dare say there is a deuced deal of exaggeration in the stories they tell about him. He was a trooper in a cavalry regiment in India; but only, he says, because he wanted to see what that sort of thing was like. And he was for a while with the Cuban insurgents. I dare say he has been a gallant young fellow enough; but

that isn't the sort of man we want for a husband for Gabrielle.'

- 'He is just the sort of man I want, Major Leven,' Gabrielle said good-humouredly. 'I wish you liked him too; I wish I could persuade you to appreciate him.'
- 'Well, well, my dear, of course it's very natural you should think so, and all that; and I dare say he is the sort of man to attract a young woman; but I think too much of you, Gabrielle, to be satisfied so easily. I thought you would have liked some one quite different. I am afraid you are doing a—well, a very Quixotic thing——'
 - 'A mad thing,' Mrs. Leven interposed.

Gabrielle rose to go. She thought she had done her part in making the announcement, and she did not care for any more of the argument. She was sorry to part from her old friends on unfriendly terms; but she had to choose, and she had chosen.

Major Leven took her hand kindly, and held it in his. 'Is there no use in trying to argue with you, Gabrielle? Is your mind then really made up? Can your friends do nothing?'

'Nothing, Major Leven, except to give me useless pain, perhaps, by saying what I ought not to hear.'

'The truth is often painful to hear, Gabrielle,' Mrs. Leven said, 'when people are bent on taking the wrong course; but it has to be spoken for all that.'

'Well, well,' Major Leven intervened, 'if Gabrielle is determined, I don't know that there is any use in our saying hard things to her, Constance. But I can't approve of this, Gabrielle. I wish you may be happy, my dear, very sincerely; but I am afraid you are not going the right way to secure your happiness.'

Nothing more was said; and so they parted. It was a relief to Gabrielle that the ungracious task was done. She knew that Mrs. Leven and she were now separated for ever so far as friendship went; and she was not sorry.

'That man will live in my Albert's house,' Mrs. Leven cried out in a burst of bitter emotion, when Gabrielle had gone.

'I don't think so,' said her husband. 'You will find they have some Quixotic project in their minds; I am sure of it, Constance.'

Great was the astonishment created in certain small

circles by the news that Gabrielle Vanthorpe was to marry the younger brother of Sir Wilberforce Fielding -the vagabond ne'er-do-well son of the rich old philanthropist Sir Jacob Fielding. The sudden reappearance of the young man himself had excited a good deal of curiosity and talk; and now this marriage-story came to revive a drooping sensation. The most extravagant rumours were afloat concerning the early life and adventures of Clarkson Fielding. Some people believed that he had lived among the Indians in America, somewhere out West as they put it. Another legend was that he had acted as fencing-master to the princes of some vaguely named Hindostanee dynasty. again, said that he had been a sailor, and had risen to be mate of a ship. Some were assured that he had made a fortune in Nevada; while some were equally confident that he had not sixpence in the world, and that he was marrying the handsome young Gabrielle Vanthorpe for her money. Then there came, to complicate things still more, the distinct assertion that Gabrielle Vanthorpe was giving away all the money she had, as a preliminary to getting married again. Whereupon certain ladies who had known her a little, and not

liked her very much, nor thought her nearly so goodlooking as some people did, observed that they had always felt sure there was a touch of madness in that poor Mrs. Vanthorpe.

Sir Wilberforce went to work lovally, so far as he was concerned, to set absurd rumour right. 'It's a very sensible marriage, just the right sort of marriage,' he repeated everywhere. 'Gad, I wish she would have married me-at least, I don't, you know, because of poor Clarkson; he's more the right sort of husband for her by far, he's young and good-looking. But only for that, I mean, I wish she could have married me. Poor? Oh, no, my brother Clarkson has a lot of money standing to his account; a lot of money for one who needn't keep up any appearance more than he likes, you know; and he's a very clever fellow, able to do anything now when he settles down. I want him to go into Parliament, as I have no taste that way; poor father would have liked one of us to be in the House. Clarkson's all right enough. No, I don't think it a bit foolish of her not to keep the property she had. A little romantic? Yes, yes; but young people ought to be romantic, don't you think so? No, no? Why not?

You see, Clarkson's an odd, independent sort of fellow—always was; he wouldn't like the idea of coming in for another fellow's money, don't you know.'

'Are they to be married in London?' some curious person would inquire in a tone half-suggesting that this absurd and eccentric pair would perhaps feel it a duty to their respectable relations to take themselves off somewhere out of civilisation, in order that their marriage ceremony might be accomplished in becoming obscurity.

'In London? Yes, yes; from Lady Honeybell's. Mrs. Vanthorpe is staying at Lady Honeybell's until the marriage. Do you know Lady Honeybell? No? The kindest woman; yes, yes.'

So people were only puzzled more and more. The marriage was evidently approved of not only by Sir Wilberforce Fielding, who was universally accounted a pattern of respectability, but even by Lady Honeybell, who was the wife of an earl. Some few persons were delighted to hear of the marriage. One of these was Miss Elvin. She could not conceal her gratification that Mrs. Vanthorpe had had to put up with the goodfor-nothing younger son after all. She utterly declined

to believe that Gabrielle had been proposed to by Sir Wilberforce, before Clarkson came with his offer. the contrary, she gave with much vivacity her account of the affair; how Clarkson made love to the young widow, how Gabrielle, being determined to marry some one, because she had missed her game with young Mr. Taxal, accepted Clarkson promptly, and was terribly let in when the elder brother, with the title and the property, came and made his offer the very next day. Miss Elvin was fast acquiring quite a reputation as a wit. She felt herself growing in power with each new repetition of her story about poor Mrs. Vanthorpe's disappointment. The curious thing about it was that it gave her a genuine pleasure even to tell those parts of the story that she knew not to be true. One of her strongest reasons for hating Gabrielle was because she fancied that, only for Gabrielle and her spells, Walter Taxal would certainly have converted her, Gertrude Elvin, into the Honourable Mrs. Taxal. She knew perfectly well that Walter had fallen in love with Gabrielle, and had asked her to marry him, and she hated Gabrielle for it. Yet it not merely gratified her malice, but it positively soothed her self-conceit, to

go about telling people that Mrs. Vanthorpe had tried her best to get young Mr. Taxal, Lord Taxal's son, and had failed. She liked to hear the thing said, even by The French lady who said it pleased her to hear herself. the sound of a compliment, even though she knew it not to be true, and even though it was only said by herself to herself, would find, if she studied the meannesses of others as fairly as she did her own, that malice can be fed on food as unsubstantial as vanity itself. Elvin was becoming a decided success in the musical Her concerts were always attended by a fashionable crowd. Places had to be taken for them long in advance. She drove in her brougham-hired, to be sure, but hired for the season, and therefore in a manner her own. Her brother dressed very handsomely, and devoted himself to acting as her escort and her man of business. She was really attached to him, and even looked up to him, though he could do nothing in particular. She liked to see him well dressed, and to know that her money made him a gentleman. Everything was smiling on her. Yet she could not forgive Gabrielle Vanthorpe for not having appreciated her singing, for having nevertheless patronised her, and for

having brought her to meet people like the Charltons. Miss Elvin had to the full that peculiar form of the artistic temperament which Heine illustrates humorously, when he speaks of marrying some lovely being and getting divorced from her if she does not praise his verses as highly as he thinks they deserve.

Meanwhile the lovers went on loving, and wholly indifferent to what their friends and enemies were saying. Gabrielle Vanthorpe had taken up her abode, for the time, with Lady Honeybell, and Fielding stayed for the most part in an hotel not far away. They had, for the present, to do without the exquisite hours of gloaming; for they saw each other only in the usual prosaic way proper to well-ordered conventionality. Mrs. Bramble and her husband took care of Gabrielle's little house for the present, and Fielding came there sometimes at the same hour of gloaming, and got Mrs. Bramble's leave to sit alone in the room where Gabrielle and he had sat before. A very harmless amusement, Mrs. Bramble thought, and she fancied he must find it dull, and she once asked him wouldn't he like to have the lamps lighted. But he thanked her and said no, he preferred to sit in the room as it was; and when it grew almost quite dark he always got up and went away. Mrs. Bramble thought him rather an eccentric young man, but she liked his friendly, frank ways, and his genial smile; and she sometimes said, 'Well, one can't blame poor Miss Gabrielle,' as she still occasionally called her, 'after all.'

CHAPTER IV.

PAULINA LAUNCHES HER FIRE-SHIP.

THERE was one person on whose ears the news of Gabrielle's approaching marriage came with a startling effect. Paulina Vanthorpe had become a sort of heroine, with a certain class of persons who are always looking out for the victim of a grievance. She had actually taken a hall, and held meetings to discourse of her She had mixed up somehow the cause of wrongs. woman's rights, and the wickedness of compulsory vaccination, with her own personal wrongs; and, in the minds of ordinary persons, produced a sort of confusion as to whether the Mrs. Vanthorpe who addressed public meetings was the heroine of an agitation against private madhouses, or a feminine copy of the Tichborne Claimant, or a champion of the right of women to enter the medical profession, or an American lady in-

spired to denounce the evils of the marriage system. For a time things went rather swimmingly with her. She managed to attract audiences; she delivered orations in a strong shrill voice, with much energy of dramatic action, and on any subject that happened to occur to her mind at the moment. She got invitations to attend other meetings; she appeared as the supporter of the crotchet of anyone who chose to invite her. She was quite a distinguished person; and in more than one instance, the prospective candidate for a metropolitan borough had been asked, by a deputation of voters, to favour them with his opinions on the question of Mrs. Vanthorpe and her wrongs, before they could see their way to support his claims to a seat in Parliament. Paulina therefore was busy, and, for the time, happy. She was really under the impression that she was becoming a remarkable public character, and her vanity was fed on the absurd applauses she received. She felt satisfied, too, that she was greatly tormenting the Levens; and that was a joy to her. But in the midst of her business, and her public triumph, she suddenly learned that Gabrielle Vanthorpe was to marry Clarkson Fielding. The strongest passion of her nature was

that of hate. Revenge was sweeter to her than the wearing of fine clothes, or the gratification of vanity. The Eastern princess who said that there was only one sound she enjoyed more than hymns of praise, namely, the groans of tortured enemies, would have found a sister and a sympathetic spirit in Paulina. Paulina would have made an excellent Oriental princess, if her destinies had been cast a little differently. It was only her accidental misfortune that her early years were passed in a Seven Dials' publichouse, and not in the royal Palace of Delhi.

When she heard the news, she first gave free vent to one of her paroxysms of rage, stamped, wallowed, broke a few glasses and other fragile things; and then, recovering, prepared for more practical action. She hated Clarkson Fielding. She felt sure she could have established herself safely among the Levens and Vanthorpes only for him. She had an old spite, too, against him. The bitter injury of the despised form, which drove goddesses to deeds of unworthy vengeance, rankled in the very human heart of Paulina Vanthorpe. As nearly as such a woman could go to falling in love she had once gone to falling in love with Clarkson Fielding;

and she had been repelled, and even rebuked by him, in a way as surprising as it was humiliating to her. All her old anger returned when she thought of his marrying Gabrielle. She filled her mind with the conviction that he had stood between her and every object which she had particularly at heart, and she determined that it should go hard with her but she would be even with him for once. She racked her brain for some device, and at last she hit upon a little plot which for absurd audacity would have done credit to the immortal Scapin, or to one of the Raphaels and Ambroses and other gifted adventurers who made the acquaintance of Gil Blas.

It was from some words of Gabrielle's own that the ingenious Paulina caught this idea. The destinies seemed to have resolved that Gabrielle should never do a kindly thing, or speak a friendly word, but that some result perplexing to herself should come of it. During Paulina's stay at Gabrielle's house the good-natured Gabrielle had endeavoured in many ways to assure her of the interest which some of his connections, at least, had always taken in the fortunes of the outcast Philip Vanthorpe. Among other things, Gabrielle told her of the wild idea she had formed at first about Clarkson

Fielding; how she actually got it into her head that he was the long-lost Philip Vanthorpe; how she even persuaded herself that she could trace a distinct resemblance between his face and that of Mrs. Leven, as she studied their features at the concert in Lady Honeybell's drawing-room. The idea struck Paulina now all of a sudden. To say that it struck her is only a fair way of describing what actually occurred, for it made her cheeks flush with a sudden crimson, and it made her eyes sparkle and flame; and she jumped up, and danced about the floor, screaming out that she had got Master Clarkson now, at last. There was a certain dash of the maniac in Paulina, along with her sane shrewd adventuress qualities. In her controversy with the Levens she often found herself positively carried away by a selfwrought sense of wrong. She sometimes succeeded in persuading herself that she was Major Leven's stepdaughter, or even daughter. Other slatternly minds are wanting in any clear perception of the literal truth; Paulina's was wanting in a perception even of the actual truth. The latest, hardest facts of her own life were liable to be blurred, or entirely transfigured, by the passion or wish of the moment. She was capable of starting an imposture in cold blood for a definite purpose, and was liable to become, before long, one of its completest dupes. The author of a work of fiction, once the delight of unnumbered slums and now probably forgotten even there, has left it on record that, in describing some daring adventure of his highwayman hero, he became so completely possessed by his own creative powers that he leaped, danced, and shouted all about his room, and seemed to gallop with mad speed like his hero, and like him to hurl laughter and defiance at pursuing foes. Had Paulina's early education prepared her for the writing of such fiction, she would probably have identified herself to the full with the fortunes of her favourite personage, and made its delights and passions and triumphs her own. Perhaps, if the Education Act and the School Boards had started a little earlier, they might have secured this honourable opening for the imaginative powers of Paulina, and she would have gratified her vanity and avenged her wrongs in the comparatively harmless pages of the sensation romance.

Paulina thought a good deal about the best way of launching her little fire-ship. It became clear to her

almost at once that the effect of the revelation she proposed to make would be greatly enhanced by its coming out in a spontaneous and accidental sort of way.

The Charltons were in their room in Bolingbroke Place one night. Robert was working, Janet sewing as usual. Robert was a little more cheerful than usual; for since Paulina Vanthorpe had become a public character he thought there was more chance of her dispensing with his services, and he was beginning to have a hope that the acquaintanceship might fade away without bringing any particular disgrace or harm on him. To them presently bustled in Mr. Lefussis, who, although he fancied he saw himself getting up in the world again, was not yet able to renounce his humble lodgings, and was not disposed to give up his old friends. He was full of talk and good spirits. had been certain hints held out to him of a possible change of government, and of men coming in who, on the urgent recommendation of some of his friends, might reward his long public services with some small Colonial appointment. The mere hope of such a thing was as much to Lefussis as an actual invitation to join a Cabinet would be to another man. Mr. Lefussis was already beginning to think what he could do for Charlton; and, indeed, was already hinting at something of the kind, much to Charlton's disgust.

A rapid, rather authoritative succession of knocks was heard. Janet opened the door, and was confronted by a lady of imposing presence clad in trailing silks.

'Is Mr. Charlton in?' the lady asked. 'Oh, thank you, yes; I see that he is.' She swept past Janet, who began to fancy this must be some imperious countess, at the least, whose work Robert had neglected to complete at the appointed time. 'How do you do, Mr. Charlton? Pray don't disturb yourself. I was belowstairs, and I thought I'd come to see you. This is your wife, I presume? Won't you do me the favour to introduce me, Mr. Charlton?'

Robert was pale with fear and anger. He seemed as if he were swearing under his breath. He had to do the honours.

'This is my wife,' he said. 'Janet, this lady is Mrs. Vanthorpe. You have heard me speak of her.'

As a matter of fact, Janet had never heard him speak of her. Naturally the name and performances of

Paulina had been talked about a good deal when Janet's aunt came to visit her relatives in Bolingbroke Place: but Janet had always observed that Robert would not join in the conversation or say a word about the muchtalked-of woman. She set this down in her own mind to Robert's conviction that Paulina was not a person to be made the subject of conversation among people with becoming ideas of propriety. She did not know that he had ever seen Paulina before; and she was surprised to hear Paulina claim him as an acquaintance. turned cold, and felt miserable. She faintly acknowledged the gracious bow of Paulina, and shrank back. Mr. Lefussis, meanwhile, handed Paulina a chair, with all the greater show of courtesy because since the famous night at St. James's Hall he regarded her in the light of a political opponent.

'I think I have had the pleasure of meeting this gentleman before?' the queenly Paulina observed, turning to Mr. Lefussis, and bending her long neck at him. 'Mr. Fuzbuz, if I am not mistaken?'

'Lefussis, madame, Mr. Lefussis,' the owner of that name replied. 'It is an old Norman name. My ancestor Jasper de Lefussis——'

- 'Came over with the Conqueror, didn't he?'
- 'He did,' Mr. Lefussis answered, somewhat astonished at the variety and accuracy of her historical information.
- 'I thought as much,' Paulina observed. 'They all did, I fancy, more or less. Finding of the body of Harold, and all that, ain't it? I used to hear all about it.'

Mr. Lefussis began to be somewhat puzzled now by the manner of her observations.

'I don't exactly remember now who the Conqueror was,' the lady said with a gracious laugh; 'but I know that he brought no end of people over with him. Anyhow, that's neither here nor there, and it will be all the same to us a hundred years hence. We ain't enemies, I hope, Mr. Lefussis, although we did happen once to be opposed in public?'

Lefussis was for once rather put out. He bowed solemnly, and mumbled some words supposed to express chivalric readiness to accept any terms Paulina chose to offer.

'I oughtn't to feel annoyed, anyhow; I won the battle that night—eh, Mr. Lefussis? I think I see the

old Major sneaking off the platform now. I have had great wrongs, Mr. Lefussis, as you would admit if you were not prejudiced by your friendship for them Levens; but I don't blame you for holding by your friends; it isn't quite too common a thing in this world just now.' Paulina sighed, and laid a strong emphasis on the word 'this,' as if she were well acquainted with various other worlds where a stauncher spirit of friendship informed the beings that inhabited them.

Then Paulina turned to the general company, and observed that she had come that way to see Mr. Fielding, and not finding him in his rooms bad felt that she ought to avail herself of the opportunity to visit the Charltons, and see Mrs. Charlton, of whom she had heard so much. Janet shuddered.

'I thought, perhaps, you could tell me something about Mr. Fielding,' Paulina went on. 'I was in his rooms, but he is not there. What a careless fellow he is! He never locks his door, I believe. Anybody may go in or out.'

'He is very careless,' Charlton said eagerly. He was very glad to bring out prominently the fact that anybody could go into Fielding's rooms, for he was still

afraid that something might come of his having furtively gone in there.

- 'Oh yes, I was in there just now,' Paulina said. 'I could have carried off anything if I wanted to, or read all his letters,' and she gave her shrill little laugh. 'I have often been there before.'
- 'Have you often been there before?' Janet asked, speaking with a tremor in her voice, but determined not to let this startling assertion pass unchallenged.
- 'Oh yes, ever so often. Fielding and I are old friends, as your husband knows. Didn't he ever tell you, Mrs. Charlton? I say, Charlton, I begin to think you keep secrets from your little wife. I thought you were like turtle-doves.'
- 'I don't talk gossip and other people's affairs to my wife,' Charlton said, growing hot and embarrassed. 'Our own concerns are enough for us.'
- 'Enough for her, don't you mean?' Paulina asked, with another laugh. 'That's how it is. You see he's getting angry, Mrs. Charlton. Oh, I begin to fancy he is a sly one.'
- 'You were asking about Mr. Fielding,' the chivalric Lefussis interposed, anxious at any cost to turn the

conversation to some neutral subject. 'I don't fancy he will come very often to his chambers here any more. I have been talking to him about them; he will be giving them up, of course, and I think they would suit me better than the set I have.'

One of the many illusions shining happily over the life of poor Lefussis was that he was just about to give up the rooms he had, and go into a more expensive and commodious set of chambers. He was proceeding to enlarge upon the subject, when Paulina interrupted him by asking in a tone of some surprise,

- 'Why should he be giving up these chambers? Why "of course"? Where is he going to?'
 - 'Well, you know, of course, when he gets married-'
 - 'When he gets what?'
 - 'When he gets married.'
- 'When he gets fiddlesticks!' Paulina said, turning in her chair with a contemptuous gesture.
- 'I did not say when he gets fiddlesticks,' Mr. Lefussis answered with dignity. 'I know nothing about his getting fiddlesticks. I said when he gets married.'
 - 'Stuff!—he ain't going to get married.'
 - 'Oh, yes,' Janet said quietly, 'he is.'

- 'To whom, ma'am, may I ask?' Paulina wheeled round upon Janet, and fixed her glittering eyes on the timid little woman. Janet, however, felt more dislike now than dread of her questioner.
 - 'To Mrs. Albert Vanthorpe.'

Paulina rose from her chair.

- 'To the young woman Gabrielle?'
- 'To the young lady whose christian name is Gabrielle,' Janet answered with less tremor than before.
 - 'It's a lie!' exclaimed Paulina.
 - 'Oh, madam, pray'-Mr. Lefussis expostulated.
- 'I don't mean it's a lie for you, Mr. Fuzbuz,' Paulina went on breathlessly, 'nor for you, Mrs. Charlton—which forgive me if I seemed to say; far from it, indeed. But it's a lie for him, if he says it—and I can't believe he does say it.'
 - 'Everybody says it, madam,' Lefussis observed.
 - 'I don't care about everybody, Mr. Fuzbuz---'
 - 'Lefussis, madam, if you please.'
- 'Anything you like, sir; it's all one to me just now, I can assure you.'
- 'But it really is not all one to me, madam, I can assure you.'

- 'Oh there, don't bother. I ask your pardon, I didn't mean to offend you; but can't you understand that there are things more important to us all sometimes than other people's names? I dare say there are times when you wouldn't care a straw if my name was Jack Robinson. What I want to know is—who says Fielding is going to marry Gabrielle Vanthorpe?'
- 'He says it himself, if that is all you want to know,' Robert Charlton replied, feeling a genuine interest in the turn the talk had now taken. 'He told me of it the last day I saw him.'
- 'He told me so too,' Lefussis said. 'At least, I offered him my congratulations on the faith of a certain rumour, and he accepted them, and gave me to understand that the rumour was true.'
 - 'Why, of course it is true,' Janet added.
- 'Then I tell you what—he is a liar; and, mark my words, this marriage will never take place.'
- 'Why not?' Charlton asked. 'Who will prevent it?'

Paulina tossed her head scornfully.

- 'I will prevent it.'
- 'I think, Charlton, if you will allow me,' Lefussis

said, 'we had better change the conversation. I don't feel as if I had any right to enter into this matter, and I'm sure you don't, and Mrs. Charlton. Whatever this lady may have to say——'

'She'll say it out in the open day, you may be sure, Mr. a—a—Thingumbob; and she'll stand by it too. You may stay and hear it, if you like. All the world shall hear it soon. I want Charlton to hear it, and his wife; for they will tell me what to do. I tell you again, I can prevent this marriage, and I will.'

'I think, Charlton, I had rather go,' Lefussis said; and he backed out of the room.

Charlton was eager to hear what Paulina had to say. He was longing to know something against Fielding, and he hated the thought of his being married to Gabrielle.

- 'How can you prevent it?' he asked in a half-contemptuous tone, designed to goad Paulina on to a full revelation.
- 'Prevent it? I'll tell you how I'll prevent it. Can a man marry two women, both alive? He can't. Very well, then; Clarkson Fielding is married already.'

Charlton was really startled at this; he had not

expected anything so strong. Janet felt as if she might faint at any moment.

- 'But how could you prove this?' Charlton asked.
 'How could you know it for certain?'
 - 'I do know it for certain.'
- 'The other wife would have to be produced—his wife, I mean.'

Paulina folded her arms across her breast with the air of a tragedy queen.

'I am his wife!' she said.

A thrill of utter incredulity went through the listeners now; and there was some horror mingled with the incredulity. They now began, Charlton as well as his wife, to think that they were talking to a madwoman.

'But,' Charlton said, quietly and almost soothingly, 'you know that couldn't be, Mrs. Vanthorpe,' and he laid an emphasis on the name. 'You know that your husband was Mr. Philip Vanthorpe.'

A smile of superior scorn passed over Paulina's lips, and she looked from one face to another, as if enjoying their bewilderment before she disposed of their doubts for ever. 'My husband was Philip Vanthorpe,' she said, 'and he is Philip Vanthorpe. The man you call Clarkson Fielding is Philip Vanthorpe himself, and nobody else!'

Charlton struck the table sharply with his fist.

'I knew there was something wrong about that man,' he exclaimed. 'I knew it from the first. I always said so, Janet—didn't I?'

Poor Janet could not answer. She dropped into a chair, and the room seemed to swim around her.

CHAPTER V.

'AN EXCELLENT PLOT: VERY GOOD FRIENDS.'

ROBERT CHARLTON doubtless believed for a while in the truth of Paulina's story. From the first he had been eager to believe in it. He detested Fielding. He felt a sort of spite, the reason for which he could hardly have defined even to himself, against Gabrielle. He had always predicted that something would be found out to Fielding's discredit; and his prophetic insight seemed now made good at last. Therefore he went into Paulina's story with an eager hope that it might prove true.

But it was really wonderful what a plausible, consistent tale Paulina told him, and what scraps of corroboratory evidence she brought to sustain it. She made rather Robert Charlton her confidant in the beginning; her leading counsel, so to speak, who was

to advise upon the case and its further progress. Philip Vanthorpe and she were married in haste, she said, and after a while they did not get on very well together. They made the acquaintance of Clarkson Fielding; they were very intimate with him; Philip and he led a very wild life together. Fielding died in New Orleans. Vanthorpe and she had been anxious to return to England, and also anxious to get rid of each other. Philip was convinced his mother would never be reconciled with him, nor did he want to be reconciled with her. But he thought if Paulina were to pass off as his widow she would have a good chance of being taken into favour, and therefore it was settled between them that Paulina was to go back to England with a story of his death and to make the best use she could of it. Then came the death of Clarkson Fielding, and it suddenly occurred to Vanthorpe that it would be a good thing if he were to personate Clarkson Fielding, and see whether he could not recover the money which Fielding had always told them he had left untouched in his brother's hands. The idea had a great fascination for Vanthorpe, who liked audacious enterprises of any kind, and he determined to carry it

out. Therefore the pair came to England almost at the same time, but not in the same vessel, and they went to work with their plot. They were to help each other as much as possible, and were to divide the spoils if necessary; but they were not going to live together any more or to acknowledge each other. It was the principal object of each to be rid of the other. 'But,' Paulina added, 'I wasn't going to stand his marrying another woman while Paulina Vanthorpe was alive; not if I knew it. That wasn't in the bargain, and he was a great fool to think any woman would stand that.'

That was the story. The points which Paulina impressed upon Charlton were, that she and the man calling himself Clarkson Fielding turned up in London just about the same time, and she appealed to Charlton whether it was not within his own knowledge that this man came to see her often when she was on the Surrey side; that Gabrielle, when first she saw him, was convinced that he was Philip Vanthorpe, from his likeness to Mrs. Leven; that Gabrielle had even taxed him with being Philip Vanthorpe; that Sir Wilberforce Fielding said he should never have known him

for his brother; that the professed Fielding never could or would give any clear account of what happened to Vanthorpe; that he and she had always lived in New Orleans under the name of Clarkson, a name which a man whose real name had 'any Clarkson in it,' as Paulina put it, would not have been likely to adopt for the purpose of concealing his identity.

Eager as he was to believe all this, Robert could not but ask how it happened that the man calling himself Clarkson Fielding had done so much to prevent Gabrielle Vanthorpe and her relations from receiving Paulina. Paulina laughed at what she called his simplicity. All that only came about, she said, when they found that Mrs. Leven was inexorable, and that nothing was to be got out of her; while, on the other hand, Sir Wilberforce was very good-natured, and there was ever so much to be got out of him. Then they believed the best policy was to throw all their strength into what Paulina described as 'the Fielding business,' and it was thought a capital way of turning off any suspicion of conspiracy, and making it certain that he was the real Clarkson Fielding, if he were to play the

part of her enemy and to denounce her to the Levens. She was to have her share of the profits, she said; and they had even some hope that, as Sir Wilberforce was not married, Clarkson might in the end come in for the property. It was understood that the so-called Clarkson was to be free, for this reason, to do his best to prevent the marriage between Sir Wilberforce and Gabrielle. 'But it wasn't understood,' Paulina grimly said, 'that he was to marry her himself. He must know precious little of women if he fancied any woman would stand that. He ought to have known more of me, anyhow. I didn't care who he made love to and that sort of thing; but he's not going to marry a woman under my eyes, you may be sure.'

One chance, or apparently chance, allusion threw Robert into such a condition that he would have been glad to believe her if she had charged the so-called Clarkson Fielding with any series of crimes she chose to fancy. 'Why did he live in Bolingbroke Place?' Charlton happened to ask.

'Oh, don't you know?' Paulina asked, with an odd little laugh.

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- 'No, I don't,' Charlton said roughly; 'tell me.'
- 'Well, I don't know, I'm sure—one oughtn't to tell, perhaps. Can't you guess at all?'
- 'I can't guess; I want you to tell me.' He was now growing hot and angry. 'I must know.'
- 'Well, I say, you are a soft one! I don't know, you see, Charlton, any more than you. He never told me, you may be sure, any more than he did you; not likely. I only guess. But then I seem to know a little more of the world than you do, anyhow.'
- 'I wish you would speak plainly,' Charlton said, jumping from his seat.
- 'Lord, man, you needn't get so excited about it. You needn't care twopence; your little wife is as good as a little angel, anyone can see that; but she's a very pretty little woman, Charlton, and you don't ought to be surprised that other men should admire her as well as her husband. Lord bless you, men are all alike. The times that men would have made love to me, if I had only allowed them! But I was always like your little wife, Charlton—keep them at a distance always, that's my motto, even the best of them. You see what thanks I am getting from my husband.'

Robert felt himself almost going wild with passion. He hated Paulina now; but he would have made himself her slave for the purpose of seeing her plans prove successful. Half-unconsciously, not without some consciousness, he kept suggesting doubts as to certain parts of her story, and with the doubts the additions or explanations that might satisfy them. Paulina caught at every hint, and was ready with any missing links of evidence. The story soon began to grow into shape and consistency.

Most of these conferences took place in Janet's presence; only the talk about her and her attractiveness was held during a short absence of hers. She was virtually thrust into a corner. Her opinion was never asked. She had to sit and look on while these two were arranging evidence under her eyes. Robert quelled her into silence if she attempted to interpose a word; and the tall, showy woman acted as if the household were her own. She came every day, and Robert put everything aside for her. Janet could hardly recognise him any more. He was like what she had sometimes read of—a man possessed by a demon. She began to be ashamed of him as well as afraid.

The place and her whole life were becoming hateful to her.

'Robert,' she began one evening, after the odious visitor had gone, 'how long are we to have this horrid woman coming here?'

He looked up, and for a while did not seem as if he intended to answer the question. At last he said:

- 'Until I understand the whole of her story. I am advising her how to proceed. You ought to feel for her, Janet; any woman ought to feel for her.'
- 'I so hate her,' Janet said, unable to keep down her feelings.
- 'Oh, of course,' he said coldly; 'I ought to have remembered—women always hate other women.'
- 'It isn't that, Robert; I don't hate every woman; but I do hate her, and I don't believe her story.'
- 'You wouldn't believe anything against him, to be sure,' he said, with a sneer. 'I knew that long ago.'

Janet grew red, but did not resent his words.

'I am sure she's not telling the truth,' she went on. 'Why, Robert, I can see her myself; she catches up everything you say and makes it fit into her story. I can see it.'

'Perhaps you had better say I am in a conspiracy with her to make up a string of lies. Is that your idea?'

'Oh, no,' poor Janet said. 'I know you don't mean it, Robert; but if you were listening as I am, you would see how she catches at things. If you watched her as I do, you would not believe her, I am sure, Robert. You would not, indeed.'

'I did not know that you were so observant a person, or such a judge of evidence. Hadn't you better become a criminal lawyer at once, Janet?'

'And then it seems so cruel and so ungrateful,' Janet said. 'There are we plotting hour after hour with this woman to bring grief to the only person who ever was really kind to us since we were married. I wonder at you, Robert; I do.'

'Who is the only person who was kind to us?' he asked, with livid cheeks. 'Do you mean that fellow—because he paid you compliments, I suppose, and flattered your silly vanity?

'I mean Mrs. Vanthorpe,' Janet answered, and

there was a certain dignity in her simple, firm manner. 'She was kind to us; she tried to do good for us; she always treated you as if you were a friend, Robert, and—and—a gentleman; and I hate to see you join ing with this woman against her.' Janet's voice began to give way, and she was evidently on the edge of a burst of tears.

'Why, you fool, do you call that joining against her to save her from being taken in by a man who has a wife already? Why, you are a greater fool than even I thought you—I tell you I am acting as her best friend would act. I am saving her from the schemes of a scoundrel and helping to have them exposed.'

'But I don't believe a word that woman says,' Janet said, falling back on her old position. 'And why should we be the persons to do it? Oh, she will hate us—at least, she won't hate us, perhaps, for she is too good and too sweet for that; but she will think badly of us and despise us. If there is any truth in this story, why don't you go and give her fair warning of it, like a man? Let me go and tell her—oh, Robert, do. It wouldn't seem so bad then as all this

secrecy and all this plotting—it looks like plotting. Let me go and tell her.'

'Go and tell her that your husband is plotting against her? That is just what you would like to do, I dare say——'

'Oh, no, Robert; how can you say so? Only just to warn her; just to put her on her guard, that the poor young lady mayn't be taken quite by surprise. Why, Robert, it might kill her.'

'Perhaps you would like to go and warn him too, lest he should be taken by surprise? You had just better do so.'

Janet's colour came up again. She began to despise her husband. She was silent. Her silence seemed to impress him somehow more than her words had done; for he said after a while, in a tone intended to be gentle and more persuasive:

'Look here, Janet: you are very foolish. Don't you see that this woman's story may prove not to be true at all? And why should we torment Mrs. Vanthorpe about a story that may be all false? I am sifting this woman's statement very carefully. I hope you will admit that I am not wholly devoid of brains,

although I am your husband, Janet; and if I find that it breaks down, you may be sure I shall know how to act. But it would be simple madness to breathe a word of it to Mrs. Vanthorpe just yet. Your supposed friendship would only lead you into a mere act of unnecessary cruelty. Don't you see that yourself?'

'If I only could think that you wished it not to be true! But you go on to her as if you wanted it all to come out true.'

'It's nothing to me whether it's true or false; only, if it is true, I don't want an innocent lady made a victim and a scoundrel to go unpunished. Perhaps you would rather see the lady victimised than the scoundrel punished; but that isn't my way.'

'But why does that woman come here to us? I hate to see her always here.'

'Jealous of her, I suppose?' Robert said, with a sneer. 'I don't think you need be alarmed, Janet.'

'She is a beast,' said Janet emphatically.

Robert laughed. 'Just like women,' he said. 'I believe she is a little bit jealous of you, Janet.'

'Jealous of me?' Janet asked in wonder and

anger. She was growing surprisingly courageous of late.

'Oh, yes, I think so. She is under the impression that her husband was quite taken by your charms.'

'Her husband?'

'Yes, her husband. The fellow that used to live below stairs. She is under the impression that he took chambers here in order to have the pleasure of looking at you.'

'I didn't believe he was her husband before,' said Janet; 'I know he is not now. I know there isn't a word of truth in all she says. Look here, Robert: I won't have that woman coming here any more. No, I'll not have it.'

Charlton looked up amazed. His wife was standing up now, and there was a sparkle in her eyes such as he had not seen before. She was trembling all over; but she had evidently plucked up a spirit.

The stairs of Bolingbroke Place were given to much creaking. The step of a mounting visitor was heard a long way in advance when there was no other noise prevailing. This was now the quiet evening hour—

about six, when Bolingbroke Place was having its tea. The silence of the house was disturbed for Charlton and his wife by the light rapid tread of a woman coming up the stairs. It came nearer and nearer.

- 'It is she!' Janet exclaimed. 'Oh, yes, it's she.'
- 'It's who?' Charlton asked, catching some of his wife's excitement.
- 'It's Mrs. Vanthorpe! I know her step; she's coming here.'

Robert jumped up.

'Now, remember, Janet, if you say a word of this, you may make her miserable for nothing; and I'll never forgive you.'

Janet was moving towards the door. He came between and stopped her way.

- 'Do you understand?' he asked in a fierce, low tone. 'You are not to say a word; not a word.'
- 'I understand,' Janet said. 'I'll say nothing, Robert—for her sake, mind.'
- 'For any sake you like,' he replied, 'as long as you hold your tongue.' Then he gave way and allowed

her to open the door, which she did even before Gabrielle had knocked.

Gabrielle came in looking like a living illustration of youth and grace and happiness. There was a certain shyness about her manner not usual to it, and which perhaps gave it another charm. She felt her own happiness so much that it made her timid. It seemed to her that she owed a sort of apology to human beings in general for being so happy when they perhaps were not all so. Besides, she had come with the resolve to carry out a somewhat difficult, or at least a somewhat delicate, purpose with the Charltons. She kissed the pale Janet and shook hands with Robert.

- 'You are looking very pale, Janet,' she said. 'Is she not well, Mr. Charlton?'
- 'Thank you,' he answered, 'I don't fancy she is unwell. I haven't heard her complain.'
- 'Ah, but I am afraid that is not quite a proof—I don't think she would complain. She is too much in town, Mr. Charlton; and you too. I see now that you are looking very pale. You ought to get out of this place for a while.'

- 'People like us can't so easily get out of town; we must stay where our work is. We are no worse off than our neighbours, I dare say.'
- His manner was somewhat sharp and brusque; but Gabrielle did not feel in any way hurt by it. She set it down to the not unnatural pride of an unsuccessful man who is resolved to show that he seeks no favour. Just now his words were welcome to her, for they gave her a chance of coming to her point.
- 'Well,' she said, 'I came to see Janet and you today for the purpose of saying something about that. You know, I suppose'—and she hesitated a little and coloured—'that I am going to be married soon—to Mr. Fielding?'

Yes; the Charltons both stammered out that they had heard, and Robert added something about congratulations. As for Janet, she trembled so that she could hardly make herself heard.

'Well, after that we are going out of England for some time; perhaps rather a long time. I have no one to live in my house—I don't know yet what I shall do with it in the end, but it must remain as it is for some time; and Mr. and Mrs. Bramble will stay in it as they

do now for the present. Now, what I thought of was this—if you and Janet would kindly occupy it while I am away—a year, perhaps, or so—it would be a great favour, and take ever so much responsibility off my hands. It is a nice place, you know, with good air and open space all around, and the park, and its own little patch of ground; and I think you would find it a pleasant change. Janet would like it, I am sure.' She looked from one to the other with half-shy eagerness.

'You are very kind,' Robert said; 'but I am afraid one must keep near one's work.'

'Oh, but I have thought of all that. We are not so stupid about business affairs, we women, Mr. Charlton, as you think us—are we, Janet? Of course I know that people couldn't be expected to find you out in a little house hidden away among trees. But our idea—Mr. Fielding's and mine—was to look you out a place in one of the streets quite near where you could have your studio or workroom, or whatever you like to call it, and where you could go during the day, and Janet too; and you could have your name up, and you would get no end of work there, Mr. Fielding thinks.

In fact, he says that an artist of your skill is quite thrown away in a place like this. In that other end of the town he is sure you would soon get a splendid lot of work, and you would grow rich, Janet and you, even before we came back, perhaps.'

'It's very kind of Mr. Fielding to think of us poor people,' Robert said; 'we are very much obliged to him.'

Janet could only sob out, 'Oh, Mrs. Vanthorpe! and take Gabrielle's hand and press it to her lips. Gabrielle did not understand the repelling tone of the one or the emotion of the other.

'In truth,' she went on, 'we have in our minds just the place for you; we saw it the other day, and it can be had at once—if you will only let me take it for you. Come now, my friends,' she said, going straight to the heart of the matter at once, 'will you not let me do this poor little piece of kindness for you, and help to make me happy—to make me more happy, I mean; for indeed I am so happy myself that I long to bring others in to share it with me. Come, Mr. Charlton, you won't refuse me this pleasure? Janet, you will tell your husband that he need not be quite so in-

dependent as to refuse a little trifling bit of kindness from a very sincere friend? I should welcome any mark of friendship from anyone I liked. Why not?

Charlton walked up and down the room. He could not make up his mind or arrange the strife of his fighting soul in a moment. One inclination was to throw himself on Gabrielle's generosity and confess the whole of the base plot into which he had been entering against her. Another was to reject her offer with bitterness because it came from Fielding, of whom now especially, since Paulina's suggestions, he could hardly think with patience. Perhaps his better inclination might have prevailed. Perhaps he might have yielded to the softening and sweetening influence of Gabrielle's kindness and flung away his miserable morbid hates and spites and owned himself repentant. If he had done so things would have gone differently with him. But at that moment a tap was heard at the door, and Gabrielle sprang to her feet.

'Oh, here is Mr. Fielding,' she said. 'He has just come in time to help me to persuade you.' And she ran herself and opened the door and brought Fielding

in. His presence seemed to fill the dull old room with cheerfulness and energy.

'Have you talked over this dreadful old man?' he asked, after the first exchange of salutations. 'Do you know, Gabrielle, how old he is? He is a hundred and ninety years old at least; and Janet is fifteen. He is so old that he grows quite crabbed, and he won't let anyone be pleasant with him. We used to have such arguments, he and I. But he's a good fellow at heart, Gabrielle; and a manly, independent fellow. His failings lean—I wouldn't exactly say to virtue's side, but to the side of a sort of gnarled and rugged wild-growth of virtue.' Fielding rattled on in this way with the object of saving Charlton as long as he could from the embarrassment of having to give an answer or make any acknowledgment.

'You are both very kind, I am sure,' Charlton began.
'We don't well know what to say. We are not very happy at expressing ourselves, Janet and I.'

'Never mind expressing yourselves,' Fielding struck in. 'Eloquence, my dear Charlton, is the gift of men of genius like our friend Lefussis; men born to sway the multitude and the fierce democraty, and all that.

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It isn't for common men like you and me. All we would ask you now—Gabrielle and I—is just to turn this little affair over in your mind and give it a favourable consideration—you and Janet together. Then you'll tell us another time; not now; we don't want an answer now. I want Janet to have her chance of thinking it over; she has ever so much more sense than you have. We are stupid fellows, we men. When I have a wife, I shall do everything she asks me to do. That is the right way, Janet, don't you think so?'

Fielding could not rouse either of the pair into any show of animation. Gabrielle could not understand how there came to be such a cloud of constraint over them all. The talk of Fielding, even, was evidently only inspired by a forced cheerfulness. Perhaps the manner of the Charltons was owing to excess of gratitude, she thought; but really the favour did not seem by any means great enough to call for such emotion. She would have wished to do a great deal more for them; but this seemed about as much as Charlton would be likely to accept. It only amounted to the lending of Gabrielle's house for some undefined time,

and to the setting-up Charlton for a year or two in a West End studio or workroom, where he would have a better chance of making a business and a reputation. Nothing more was said on the subject. They talked for a while; but there was no heart in the talk, somehow. Gabrielle felt depressed.

'We must meet again before—before I leave England,' she said. 'You will come and see me, Janet; I am staying at Lady Honeybell's now. But if you and your husband will do me the kindness to occupy my little house, then I can see you ever so often, and that would be much better.'

She kissed Janet again, and she was positively alarmed by Janet's pale face and moist eyes, her trembling lips and affrighted, miserable looks.

CHAPTER VI.

PAULINA 'AT HOME.'

From light of any sort into gloom is usually a depress-The gloom of the staircase in any ing change. Bolingbroke Place tenement is especially sombre and dispiriting. The light in the Charltons' room was, at all events, sunlight—as much of it as could get in: the slanting sunlight of evening. It ought to have been a depressing thing to pass suddenly from that sun-lighted room to a darksome and mournful staircase, that seemed to tell only of poverty and shabby failure. But our lovers felt only a sense of relief when they emerged from the light into the gloom. Nor was this merely because they were lovers, glad to be alone anywhere, carrying in whatever darkness their own little halo of peculiar light around them. There was something in the very atmosphere of the Charltons

now that depressed and dispirited. Even the gladness of lovers felt rebuked and chilled in that sad companionship.

- 'They seem unhappy,' Gabrielle said as she and Fielding were going down the stairs together.
- 'I can't quite make Charlton out to-day,' Fielding answered; 'perhaps I can't quite make him out ever. He seems almost always morose and discontented; he works hard, poor fellow, and not much seems to come of it. But this evening he is particularly out of spirits—seems to be like what the Scotch call fey.'
- 'I wish we could do something to make them happy.'
- 'Perhaps we shall; perhaps he will get into a more reasonable mood; Janet may prevail on him. Gabrielle, you never saw my rooms? You never even looked into them. Come, you must give one glance in now before you go, and leave a memory of brightness and love there. I shall always hold them in my recollection as if they were a shrine, because it was there I lived when I first knew you. I hope to be able to get Lefussis to take them: they are much better than his; and if I could only juggle him into some belief that

he is to have them on the same terms, and if I could make up the difference without his knowledge——But all these fellows are so ferociously independent, one does not know how to manage them.'

'You talk of ferocious independence, who would not even accept a benefit at the hands of a wife!'

'Well, that's a different thing, don't you see. These are my rooms; this is the door. Come, you must cross the threshold and consecrate the place for poor old Lefussis. Then he'll find some breath of happiness in the old den that he never will be able to account for to the end of his days. Apparently some one has been lighting my lamp for me. How considerate!'

Fielding opened the door and held it open for Gabrielle to pass in. She had barely crossed the threshold when she saw that there was some one, a woman, already in the room. She did not draw back; she assumed that it was some servant or caretaker who had been lighting the lamp. She entered the room. The woman turned towards her, and Gabrielle saw that she was in the presence of Paulina Vanthorpe. Paulina

was there, without bonnet, or shawl, or cloak, like one at home.

'This is the old den, Gabrielle,' Fielding said as he followed her into the room.

Gabrielle stepped back and laid her hand upon his arm, as if to stay him from going any farther. It flashed across her mind that Paulina was mad. Fielding broke into an exclamation of surprise and anger at seeing the woman there.

- 'You didn't expect to see me, I know,' Paulina began in her grandest tone. 'No, I am an unwelcome apparition. But I am here, and I propose to stay here.'
- 'How did you get in here?' Fielding asked sternly.
 'I can do nothing for you. You must leave this place.'

Paulina laughed scornfully.

- 'You had no right to enter my room,' Fielding said.
- 'Have I not? Yes, but I have, though—and I'll soon show you that I have. Gabrielle Vanthorpe, I am sorry for you. I said I would never harm or annoy you; and no more I would now, if I could; but you

will know in the end what a service I am doing you, and you will thank me for it one day.'

- 'What are we to do?' Gabrielle asked in a low tone. 'The poor creature is mad.'
- 'I don't think it's madness,' Fielding said. 'I fancy it is a different cause. Look here, Mrs. Clarkson——'
 - 'My name is not Clarkson---'
- 'Well, Vanthorpe, then—whatever you like—it is of no use your coming here and thrusting yourself on me. I can do nothing for you. You have taken your own course, and you know very well that this lady has already been only too kind to you. Why do you continue to annoy and alarm her? What do you want? Why do you come here? What good can you get by such foolery?'
- 'I have come here because this is my proper home, as you know well. Oh, yes, you are a very clever actor, as I know well, and you can play the part of injured innocence delightfully; but I tell you what—the game is up. I didn't mind until I heard that you were going to get married—married!'—and she laughed an hysterical laugh—'and I wasn't going to stand that,

you know. Oh, no! So the game is up; I'll not play my part in it any more.'

- 'Come away, Gabrielle,' said Fielding; 'this is no place for you.' He now began to be convinced that she was right, and that Paulina's various excitements had ended in madness. 'Come away; and I'll see to this poor thing afterwards. Come, Gabrielle.'
- 'Come, Gabrielle,' Paulina said, mocking him.
 'Come, Gabrielle! But I say, No, Gabrielle. Gabrielle don't leave this room until she hears who you are, and what a trap she was near falling into. Gabrielle, do you know who that man is?'
- 'Yes,' Gabrielle answered quietly; 'I do.' Somehow it seemed to her now that Paulina was not mad.
 - 'Are you going to marry him?'
 - 'Oh, yes; I hope so.'
- 'You can't!' Paulina screamed, suddenly changing her tone for one of wild excitement. 'He has a wife already! I am his wife. He is my husband. His name is not Fielding. He is your own brother-in-law, Philip Vanthorpe!'

She screamed the words at Gabrielle. Her face, white with excitement, was close to Gabrielle's face.

The whole scene, the suddenness, the presence and the words of the furious woman—all these were too much for Gabrielle, and for the first time in her life she succumbed to the heroine's immemorial weakness. She seemed to hear the sound of a strange singing in her ears, the ceiling and floor of the room appeared to be in motion around her, and the whole world seemed to be falling on her; and then, at the acme of this tumult of odd sensations, there was a sudden sweet sense of ease and relief; and, in short, she fainted. She would have fallen on the floor if it had not been that she was still leaning on Fielding's arm; and he caught her up and held her as if she were a child.

'Look here'—he spoke to Paulina in a low tone, suffused with passion—'you stay here. If anything happens to her, I'll come back and kill you!'

He carried Gabrielle in his arms out of the room. In all his alarm for her, and with her for a burden, he contrived to get one hand free to take the key from the inside of the door, to draw the door after him, and to lock it on the outside. He had locked Paulina in. He had one distinct purpose in his mind: if any harm came to Gabrielle through that woman's means,

he would come back there and kill her. She was locked in there meanwhile as a hostage and a prisoner.

Even the intrepid Paulina felt her heart fail her as she heard the key turn on the outside after his words of terrible warning. 'He would do it, too,' she thought. She could not help liking him all the better for it.

Fielding, for all his burden, literally ran up the stairs until he got to the Charltons' room, and there he knocked loudly at the door and called, 'Janet! Charlton! Janet!' until Charlton and Janet both opened the door, and then he staggered into the room.

'She has fainted, Janet,' he said in rapid tones, but with a marvellous composure. 'Some water, please. I'll lay her here on the sofa, and you will see to her, Janet. She has been frightened.'

Janet knelt on the ground beside Gabrielle and began to touch her forehead with cold water.

'Open the window, Robert,' she told her husband, who looked like one affrighted near to death; 'we must let a thorough draught come to her. If you would keep a little away, Mr. Fielding; we mustn't crowd her, please.'

The little woman was entirely mistress of the situation. The men only seemed out of place and in her way. She looked round kindly on Fielding, and said, in the tone of one who reassures a frightened child:

'It's nothing, Mr. Fielding; she will be well in half a moment.'

Fielding gave vent to a deep sigh of relief. He could have embraced Janet in the fervour of his gratefulness.

Janet was right. Hardly half a minute passed away before Gabrielle came to herself again. Her first sensation was a sort of humiliation at the thought that she had fainted when perhaps her lover was in some trouble or danger. Her first thought was of him; a pang of remorse, as if she had deserted him. She sat up suddenly and looked round for him. For a moment she did not know where she was; but before she recovered her senses clearly enough to recognise the Charltons she saw Fielding. She gave a little cry of joy and stretched out her hand to him. Fielding knelt on the ground beside her and caught her hand and pressed it again and again to his lips.

'I was foolish to be frightened in such a way,' she said in a low, fond tone to him; 'but I am quite happy now, as you are with me.' A whole story of love and confidence was told with fullest expression in the words. Fielding felt as if his heart might burst with gladness.

'Oh—Janet!' Gabrielle said, recognising her; 'I did not know that I was here with you. I have been making rather a foolish exhibition of myself, Mr. Charlton; I never fainted before; I never thought people fainted except in novels.'

She was not saying anything about the cause of her alarm. Fielding wondered whether the shock to her nerves had been so great as to drive away for the time all recollection of what had happened before her faint. To Janet the whole thing was a mystery. Robert had his suspicions, and felt very miserable and cowardly.

Suddenly Gabrielle said very quietly:

'You were right, my friend'—she often spoke to him in this way, for the sake of that first time when, not having courage yet to use a closer and dearer expression, she had called her newly-confessed lover 'my friend'—'yes, you were right about that woman; and I was wrong. She is bad; there is no good in her. But she cannot trouble us much—can she, Clarkson?' She looked down into his eyes with such love and confidence that Clarkson almost felt his own eyes grow wet. Oh, what a moment that would have been for him if he were conscious of any secret thing that ought to come between him and that love and faith!

'She can give us no trouble,' he said, with pride as well as tenderness in his voice. 'Some little annoyance, I suppose. She is capable of anything in certain moods; and she is shameless; but we shall soon get rid of her. Listen: Charlton and Janet too. This thing will have to come out one time or other, and of course it need not be any secret even now from you two. That woman, Paulina Vanthorpe—I dare say you have heard of her—is getting up some foolery to annoy me. She insists that I am not myself at all, as the song says, but that I am Philip Vanthorpe and her husband.'

Janet broke into an inarticulate sound of pain and shame. The fact that this was no news to her made her feel as if she were a party to the conspiracy.

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Robert Charlton muttered something about its being very strange; very strange indeed. Fielding did not notice the manner of either. But Gabrielle did. It concerned her lover, all this story; and she had keen eyes for anything that seemed to imply a doubt of him.

Characteristically, she leaped to a conclusion.

- 'Did you know anything of this, Mr. Charlton?' she asked, with lighting eyes. She suddenly remembered some former talk of his about Fielding.
- 'I had heard something of it,' Charlton answered slowly, and without venturing to meet her looks.
 - 'Had you heard of it, Janet?' Gabrielle asked.
- 'Oh, Mrs. Vanthorpe!'—Janet turned imploringly to Gabrielle—' forgive me; do, do forgive me; I had heard it; but I didn't dare to say anything.'
- 'I forbade my wife to speak of it, madam,' Robert said, with an awkward effort at firmness; 'it wasn't a thing to talk about—at least, until something certain came to be known of it.'
- 'Then you know this woman, Charlton?' Fielding said; and he turned on Charlton with so stern an expression that poor Janet gave a little moan of alarm.

- 'I have known her—yes; that is, I have met her;' Charlton said. 'She spoke of this matter.'
- 'You knew of it, and you didn't tell me—or tell this lady?' Fielding said, pointing to Gabrielle. 'I shouldn't have expected that of you, Charlton.'
 - 'I wasn't at liberty to speak.'

Fielding shrugged his shoulders:

'Well, you are at liberty to speak to that woman below, I suppose—as she seems to be a friend of yours. Very good; then, take this key with which I have locked your friend in my room. I told her why I locked her in there, and she can tell you if she likes. Let her out, and tell her she can go where she pleases. and say what she pleases; and that the sooner she proclaims her story to the four corners of London, the better I shall be pleased. She will have to go on with it now-tell her that. Tell her, too, that I will never see her or speak to her again except in the presence of a good many witnesses and under the authority of a criminal court. Tell her that, Charlton; and read up the laws relating to conspiracy meanwhile, and see what you make of them.' Fielding flung the key upon the table.

'Come, Gabrielle,' he said; 'this is no place for you.'

An imploring look from Janet's eyes met him.

- 'Was this well done, Janet?' he asked.
- 'Oh, Mr. Fielding! oh, Mrs. Vanthorpe!' the poor Janet pleaded; 'you would not blame me if you only knew; I would have died rather than do anything to annoy Mrs. Vanthorpe. I would, indeed.'
 - 'I do believe you, Janet,' Gabrielle said kindly.
- 'And so do I, Janet,' Fielding said, with his habitual good-nature shining again in his eyes. 'You are a good and true woman, and I don't believe any harm of you.'
- 'Nor I of you, Mr. Fielding,' Janet declared with courageous fervour.
 - 'Thank you, Janet. I do thank you really.'
- 'You all look on me as if I was a wretch and a villain and I don't know what all,' Charlton said, with tremulous lips. 'What have I done? How was I to know that the woman's story wasn't true?—how am I to know it now?'
- 'Ah, just so!' Fielding said contemptuously. 'Come, Gabrielle.'

Gabrielle was only too willing to go. Janet stopped the way for a moment.

'Won't you shake hands with me, Mrs. Vanthorpe, before you go? I should not feel quite so miserable if you did.'

Gabrielle drew the poor little woman towards her and kissed her on the forehead. She did not speak a word.

Fielding held out his hand to Janet. Gabrielle was already at the door. Charlton came up to Fielding and said, in a voice hardly audible for passion:

'Hadn't you better kiss her too? I dare say she would like it well enough.'

He was standing in Fielding's way. The young man caught him by the collar and flung him aside; tossed him out of his path as if he were some wretched bundle of rags. Fielding did not even look back to see whether he had fallen, or what he was likely to do. 'Come, Gabrielle,' he said once more; and giving her his hand, he conducted her down the darksome stairs. The evening had now gathered in, and all was gloom. As they passed the door of Fielding's room, they did not stop a moment or say a word about its present inmate.

But on the threshold of the old house itself they stood for a moment.

'Look back upon it, Gabrielle,' Fielding said. 'It was here, just on this spot, I saw you for the first time; but I don't want ever to see it again. To-day I asked you to look in on my old place and consecrate it. It has been desecrated since then; and I don't wish ever to see it again.'

'Still, I shall always love it,' said Gabrielle, 'because I first saw you there. I think I must have loved you even that first time—if I had only known.'

- 'Then-and now?'
- 'Ah! now, of course, I do know it. But there is nothing wonderful in that. It was strange, though—was it not, my friend?—that we should both have felt so suddenly drawn towards each other that very first time?'
- 'And you trust me always?' His voice had a tremor in it.
 - 'Only try me,' was Gabrielle's quiet answer.
- 'Ah,' he said cheerily, 'you are a companion to go tiger-hunting with. The tiger has appeared, Gabrielle, and you are not inclined to run away. Come



'He tossed him out of his path.'

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shall we walk once or twice round this old square, in memory of the day when we walked round it before, and you asked me about poor Phil Vanthorpe, and you told me you were resolved to bring Wilberforce and myself together again?'

'Yes; and I told you that I would always be a friend to my friend.'

'You did.'

They walked round the little square, keeping on the strip of flags near the railings. They walked for a while without speaking. Gabrielle had not asked Fielding one single question about Paulina and her story. He understood her silence. She disdained to say a word which might even suggest that she needed any assurance of Paulina's falsehood from him.

CHAPTER VII.

'PERCHANCE, IAGO, I WILL NE'ER GO HOME.'

ROBERT CHARLTON had not fallen when Fielding, giving way to that one burst of temper, flung him aside. He only staggered a little and nearly came against Janet, who shrank from him and drew herself away into a corner of the room and sat in silence. She had heard his words to Fielding, and she despised him for them. She might have been in terror for herself. It was not easy to count on what a man like Robert might do at such a moment, and now she was alone with him. But somehow, she did not think about her personal safety; she had hardly any sense of fear. It did not seem to matter much what happened to her or to him now. They never could be the same; she never could love him any more. He had shown himself basely ungrateful to Gabrielle; he had helped that

detestable woman in her vile conspiracy; he had been in constant communication with her before she, Janet, ever knew that there was such a creature in existence. Now he had humiliated and insulted his wife before Mr. Fielding; he had disgraced her almost as much as if he had publicly branded her with shame. If it pleased him to kill her now—why, let him do so, she said to herself. She did not see much use in living any longer, since it had come to this.

Still, she had a sort of dulled curiosity as to what her husband would do or say first. He appeared to be very quiet.

- 'Light the lamp,' he said. 'And get the other lamp; and then take that key off the table and go downstairs and let that woman out.'
- 'I'll not go near her,' Janet said, without looking at him.
- 'Are you afraid of her? Do you think she would bite you?'
- 'No; I'm not afraid of her; but I will have nothing to do with her. And if she comes up here, Robert, I'll go out of the place. Mind that. I told you I would not have any more of her.'

Robert looked up at her angrily. She was trembling; but she was not afraid. At least, she was driven to desperation.

'I don't want her up here,' he said, 'any more than you do; but you will please to remember that this place is mine. Anyone I choose shall come into it. I am the master; not you.'

He took up the lamp and the key himself, and he went out of the room. He knew now that Janet despised him, and that she would always do so. But he hardly cared much for that now. He did not care whether she saw Fielding throw him aside or not. He too was desperate. He was not even afraid of Paulina, although one who proposed to confront that impetuous prisoner at such a moment might well feel some alarm. He turned the key in the lock and threw the door broadly open. Paulina stood at the farther end of the room, with her back to the chimneypiece and her hand clinging to Fielding's heavy bronze lamp. Her attitude was like that of some furious petroleuse on whom the Versaillists had come, and who turned in despair for one last effort at resistance or revenge.

Charlton was in no humour for admiring picturesque If he had been, he might have seen someattitudes. thing in the stand and the look of Paulina that would have supplied a bold artist with a good idea for a picture. Paulina had no shawl or cloak, and all the proportions of her really fine figure were clearly seen by the light of the lamp which stood before her on a small table, and on which she kept her hand. eyes flashed what Carlyle calls 'hell-fire.' Her face, free for once of paint—at least, of fresh paint—was livid. The ravages of time as they showed in the dim light were only lines that lent to her face a certain wasted appearance of severity and of something like dignity. Her too full lips were firmly pressed together, and gave the idea of sensuous strength collecting all its energy for some last ordeal. Clytemnestra, one might have thought, must have looked somewhat like this after the deed was done and she stood prepared to defy the consequences.

But Paulina's words were not by any means in keeping with the dignity of Clytemnestra. When she saw who was coming she took her hand from the heavy lamp to which she had been holding as her sole available weapon of defence, as Byron's Olimpia clung to the great golden crucifix.

'Is it only you? Ain't there any more of you?'

Her whole manner collapsed with the change in the condition of things, and she was the vulgar Paulina Vanthorpe again.

- 'There's nobody else,' Charlton said sullenly, but a little relieved nevertheless to find that the Clytemnestra attitude was not meant for him. As he was coming down the stairs he had begun to think that Paulina might, perhaps, be in the habit of carrying a dagger in her garter ready for any emergency.
 - 'Where's he?' she asked.
 - 'Gone away with her. He sent me to let you out.'
- 'I am sorry the little woman was frightened,' Paulina said. 'She's a dear little angel, and that's a fact; and I'm awfully sorry to have to give her any pain. But in war, you know,' she added, assuming her grandiose way, 'women have got to suffer.'
- 'Besides,' Charlton said very slowly, 'if he is your husband already, you are only doing her a great service, you know.'

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- 'Oh, bother!' was the somewhat unsatisfactory answer of the unsympathetic Paulina.
 - 'Is he your husband?' Charlton asked sharply.
 - 'Didn't you hear me say he was?'
- 'And you are prepared to prove all this—that he is Philip Vanthorpe, and all the rest of it?'
 - 'You bet I am.'
- 'Remember,' Charlton said, with slow emphasis, 'it will be easy for him to show that he is not Philip Vanthorpe if he really isn't. You are running a very serious risk. He says he is determined to have the whole thing out now.'

Paulina laughed.

'Why, of course he must have the whole thing out. You don't suppose she is going to marry him until he can prove that he ain't Philip Vanthorpe and my husband? Not likely. How is he going to prove that, I want to know? I've got him in a hole, you'll see. He can't find any evidences nearer than New Orleans anyhow, if he can find any there. By that time nobody can tell what may happen. We'll have a fine bit of fun, I tell you. I've played hell-and-tommy already with the lot of them.'

At that moment Charlton felt as certain that her story was all a falsehood and a concoction as he felt certain of his own existence. For a moment he was on the verge of a resolve to denounce her and leave her. She saw, perhaps, his wavering purpose.

'Now,' she said, 'you and I have got to go to work and fix things. I ain't much of a litery character myself, and you can use the pen much better than me. You must write a letter for me to old Mrs. Leven, and I'll copy it out the best I can. We want to tell her that her son's alive, and expose a villain, and that sort of thing—you know.'

'Do you know,' Charlton asked significantly, 'what you are liable to, if you fail in this? Do you know there are laws to punish; and he won't spare you?'

She faced him suddenly with blazing eyes.

'Man! do you know anything of women? Do you know anything even of your own little wife? Don't you know that we never care for anything that may happen when our blood is up? What do I care for laws and punishments? If I burst up this marriage business, and have my revenge on the pack of them,

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they may send me to Botany Bay if they like; I don't care.'

Paulina was not well-informed as to the changes that had taken place with regard to punishment by transportation.

'Yes, but if I assist you, I may be accused of conspiracy—he talked of prosecution for conspiracy.'

'What have you got to do with it? Don't I tell you my story, and ain't you impressed with the truth of it?—and what conspiracy is there in that? You are an honest man yourself, and you believe the word of an honest woman—where's the harm in that? Why, even supposing I wasn't an honest woman, what blame could there be to you for believing me? You wouldn't be the first man that was taken in by a woman, I suppose?'

He hesitated. 'I don't quite see my way,' he said.

'You're a coward,' she replied fiercely. 'You haven't the spirit of a man or of a cat. You are afraid of him—although I told you enough about him to make even a coward pluck up a little bit of courage. Lord! what awful cowards you men are! and we women

ain't afraid of anything, once our blood's up. Your little wife seems as meek as a mouse now; see if she doesn't fly in your face if you carry things too far. I can see already that she won't stand much more of you and me hugger-muggering together, and of our trying to do anything to vex my fine Master Fielding, as he calls himself.'

The wretched Charlton mentally acknowledged with bitter pangs that there was truth in what she was now saying.

'Anyhow,' Paulina said, 'I've got you in my power, and I mean to make use of you. You have gone a good deal too far to turn back now, let me tell you. You have been in with me from the very first. Lord! how long is it since you first did me the honour to call on me in my modest abode on the Surrey side? Come along; you and me against any two. Sit down and make yourself comfortable; we'll prepare a rattling good letter for my beloved mother-in-law. We'll send a bombshell in among them. Won't the old Major look funny!'

'Are you going to stay here?' Charlton asked in amazement, as he saw Paulina setting chairs, and bring-

'PERCHANCE, IAGO, I WILL NE'ER GO HOME.' 121 ing out pens, ink, and paper with the air of one who is thoroughly at home.

'Of course I am. Ain't this my husband's place of abode? Ain't possession nine points of the law? It will be a strong card in my hand that I have settled down in my husband's rooms, and that I refuse to go out of them. What's the fellow in the papers, Punch and that—that says, in French, you know, "Here I am, and here I stick"? Well, I'm him, as far as that's concerned. Here I am, and here I stick.'

'But the people who are in charge of this house?'

'I'll tell them. These are Mr. Fielding's apartments, ain't they? Very good—ain't I Mr. Fielding's wife?'

'But if they don't believe you?'

'You'll tell them it's all right,' said Paulina composedly. 'You are known to be a respectable person; and you'll say it's all right. That will be enough. Come, don't bother any more, but go ahead and write. Don't you see it's no end of points in my favour to write to the old lady from this very place, and to have the old Major and her come over and find me here?'

In a shuddering sort of way Robert admired her

courage and her coolness. 'If one must be bad,' he thought, 'it is something at least to have nerves that are equal to one's purposes.' For his own part, he gave himself up now to her plans. Some of her words had made him morally, though not physically, as reckless as herself.

'I say,' Paulina suddenly exclaimed, 'can't we have something to drink? I'm awfully thirsty. I have money enough, if you'll send out for some brandy. And, I say, hadn't we better have the little wife down here; or let's go up to her? I don't think it seems quite proper, you know, Charlton, for you and me to be alone together in this sort of way. People might be making remarks. Lord! the world is all scandal.'

'I have brandy upstairs,' Charlton said sullenly; 'and I'll go and ask Janet if she will come down, or we go up.'

He went upstairs to Janet. She was sitting in a chair at the window looking out upon the cheerless narrow street. The light of the lamp was very dim. She was not working. Her hands lay listlessly on her lap. She looked blankly round as her husband entered, but she said nothing. Something made him anxious

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to propitiate her now. He put on an air of goodhumour.

'That's an extraordinary woman below, Janet,' he said. 'I don't quite know what to make of her; but she persists in her story, and declares she can prove every word of it. She is going to remain in the rooms below; they are her husband's, she says, and she has a right. Of course that's no affair of ours. All she wants me to do for her now is to write to Mrs. Leven and tell her story—and then let the Levens call on her for proofs. Of course I'm not in any way responsible for that. If she fails, she must take the consequences. But I think you had better come down, Janet; or let us have her up here. It would be more proper.'

'Robert, I'll not go near her,' Janet said, with a white face and lips that trembled. 'I'll not go near her, and I'll not stay in this room if she comes in. She is a vile woman; she is making up a lie, and she knows it—and you know it too, in your heart, Robert. Yes, you do—and you are helping her and prompting her all the same. I'm not very clever, but I can see that there isn't a word of truth in her story. I am

ashamed of you that you would have anything to do with such a wretch as that.'

'Your partiality for Mr. Fielding blinds you a little,' he said, with a sneer, and throwing away the pitiful olive-branch of peace he had been pretending to hold out. 'Has he been here since? I wonder you are not jealous of Mrs. Vanthorpe, as he is so fond of her.'

She looked at him with a flush coming over her cold face. She made one or two efforts to speak, but could not get the words out. At last she said:

'You have spoken in that way too often, Robert; I have put up with a great deal; I'll not bear with any more of that.'

He muttered some bitter reply, and then he got a decanter with some brandy in it and went downstairs to write the letter for Paulina. He wrote the letter, which was all Paulina wanted him to do for her cause just then. She got rid of him soon, and he was glad to go. Paulina was very anxious to maintain every appearance of the strictest propriety.

When he left her, he did not go upstairs. He went out into the streets and wandered for hours, shamed, miserable, and hopeless, hating everyone, and burning 'PERCHANCE, IAGO, I WILL NE'ER GO HOME.' 125

with the conviction that all earth and humanity and the destinies had done him bitter wrong. When, long after midnight, he returned to his rooms, they were a solitude. Janet was gone. She had not left a written word behind her to say wherefore she had gone, or whither. But the rooms were empty; Janet was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

'TIS A QUICK LIE: 'TWILL AWAY AGAIN.'

Major Leven sat in his study annotating a Blue-book and marking passages for extract from it. He was making up a formidable case against the Foreign Office, and he was full of the present effort and the joy of the coming strife. Suddenly his wife broke in upon him. Her appearance in that room was unusual. Mrs. Leven always considered it a part of the formal dignity of her position as a wife not to show any familiarity with the occupations of her husband, and not to follow him into his study. She thought it became man and wife to be habitually apart. Therefore, when Major Leven saw her enter, he knew that there was matter in it. She really looked alarmed and agitated to a degree that was uncommon indeed with her.

George, look at that letter—read that!'

She handed him Paulina's letter, just come to hand. He read it over, growing more and more perturbed as he read. 'I don't understand this,' he said, and he applied himself to read it all over again. It was not very long. Mrs. Leven sat down and waited.

- 'Stuff!' Major Leven exclaimed at last, throwing the epistle contemptuously on the table.
 - 'You don't believe it, George?'
- 'Not a word of it. It's all rubbish—it's a weak invention of the enemy,' he added, under the erroneous impression that he was quoting from the writings of William Shakespeare. 'Fancy this young fellow being your son, Philip Vanthorpe!'
- 'I don't know, George; my mind misgave me the first moment I saw him. I disliked him from the first, although then I knew no reason why.'
- 'But, good heavens! Constance, you don't really mean to say that you think your dislike of him is evidence that he must be your son?'
- 'I do,' Mrs. Leven answered solemnly. 'I have reason to dislike my son—good reason; and the moment I first saw this man, I disliked him. George, I believe this woman's story.'

Major Leven rose, and walked up and down the He was distressed by this evidence of implacable and what seemed to him unnatural feeling. He could understand hatred of a wicked minister or a plotting despot; but he could not understand private hates; above all, he could not understand a mother's hatred for her son. He did not lecture her or scold They had married in such an impulsive way, and they had got on together so quietly, and as it were by virtue of a tacit compromise, making the best of the thing when done, that they hardly felt like husband and wife. Mrs. Leven's sentiments, however much they pained him, seemed to Leven like the talk of some wrong-headed lady of his acquaintance which he could only regret and mildly deprecate, but for which he was not responsible, and which he could not attempt to control.

'At any rate, Constance,' he said, with some anger in his tone, 'I can tell you that your instincts and presentiments in this case set you quite astray. This young man is the son of old Sir Jacob Fielding, and no one else. I knew him the very moment I first set eyes on him. I'm never mistaken in recognising faces.'

- 'I always felt a doubt of him,' Mrs. Leven said decisively. 'Only the other day I told that mad girl myself that I thought that young man was just such another as my son Philip, and that I didn't believe he was Sir Wilberforce Fielding's brother.'
 - 'What do you propose to do?' he asked abruptly.
 - 'I propose to do nothing, George.'
 - 'Hadn't you better send for this young man?'
- 'No, George. Why should I send for him? If he is not my son, I don't want to see him; if he is my son, I want all the less to see him. I have nothing to do with the whole affair. But you, perhaps, who think more of that mad girl than I do—you might see her and advise her for her own sake to be careful now. She is standing on the brink of a precipice. If this man is my unfortunate son——'
 - 'But he isn't, Constance, I can assure you.'
- 'Whoever he is, this woman claims him for her husband.'
- 'Yes, that's quite true,' Major Leven acknowledged, in much distress. 'Gabrielle must be seen at once. This is a terrible business; I don't believe a word of it; but still—one can't be too careful; and she is so

impetuous, and of course would believe anything he said, poor child. It's perfectly awful all this. I know it's only a pack of lies. Good God, what a world it is! I'll go and see her at once.'

He put away his Blue-book, not without a half-sigh. He was just about to be very busy, and his heart was in the work. He had only got fairly into it; and Major Leven's thoughts in general moved a little slowly. When he was interrupted in any piece of work, he did not very easily find his place in it again. It is probable that in his righteous wrath against the inventors of false tales just then there was mingled a certain personal resentment because of his interrupted task. But he put the Blue-book aside and started forth to seek Gabrielle.

Soon the story was spread all through the little circle of which Lady Honeybell may be called the centre. It did not get talked about or even known very much among Lord Honeybell's friends. Lord Honeybell was then much engrossed by questions of local government and the adjustment of the burdens on land, and he had only a very vague idea as to who Gabrielle Vanthorpe was. He knew she was some favourite of

his wife's, but he was not clear as to the difference, if any, between her and Miss Elvin; and when his wife, seeking for his advice as a practical man, had made that clear to him, he got it into his head that Professor Elvin, whom he had seen once or twice, was Fielding; and he bewildered Lady Honeybell by telling her that he really did *not* think that man could be a gentleman.

Four persons, besides Gabrielle, resolutely declined to believe Paulina's story. These were Sir Wilberforce Fielding, Major Leven, Mr. Lefussis, and Janet. Wilberforce turned a deaf ear to the whole affair. never could be got to say more than 'My brother Clarkson? Why, of course, he is my brother Clarkson. Stuff and nonsense! stuff and nonsense!' Major Leven merely repeated that he knew Clarkson the first moment he saw him to be old Sir Jacob Fielding's son. Lefussis declared that Mr. Clarkson Fielding was a gentleman and a man of honour, 'and my esteemed friend,' and that he would take his word against the oaths of all the painted ladies the Haymarket or other place could turn out. In the mean time, he made it a point to leave his card on Fielding about twice a day. in token of undiminished confidence and regard.

But there was not much in the instinctive conviction of Mr. Lefussis to satisfy sceptics; and on the whole the testimony of Sir Wilberforce made rather for Paulina's story than against it. For Sir Wilberforce had often said that he should never have known Clarkson Fielding for his brother; and this very fact helped to make Major Leven's testimony of little value. could Major Leven, it was pertinently asked, have seen so striking a likeness to old Sir Jacob Fielding where Sir Jacob's eldest son could see none? This criticism told very effectively with many persons. It had in reality about as much value in it as the argument that it is impossible John can read the figures on the steepleclock with his naked eye, when James has to put on spectacles to make them out. It may have chanced to some of the readers of this story to revisit after many years of absence some place familiar to their youth. Such persons will, perhaps, have observed, as this writer has had occasion to do, that among the old acquaintances whom one rejoins there are two sets of what may be called extremists in the matter of recognition. are those who know you at the first glance and positively affirm that they cannot see the slightest change in

you; and there are those who declare that they should never have known you again, and that they cannot even now trace the slightest resemblance in your features and manner to the friend whom they knew so well long ago. The writer is personally acquainted with two distinct cases in which the identity of a brother was doubted by those who were nearest of kin to him, and ought to have known him best, while mere friends recognised him at once, and wondered that there could be any doubt about the matter.

The sceptics in the case of Clarkson Fielding knocked all argument down by reminding people triumphantly that Sir Wilberforce never recognised the man who called him brother, and simply took him on trust. 'You know what sort of man Sir Wilberforce is,' some sagacious persons said. 'His mind is all taken up with drain-pipes and plans of ventilation. If you or I went boldly up to him and claimed to be his brother, he would have said, 'Dare say you are. How are you? Hope you are well.' Some ladies added that 'the young man was presented to Sir Wilberforce by that pretty Mrs. Vanthorpe, and Sir Wilberforce was awfully in love with her. He would have taken the Claimant

for his brother, if Mrs. Vanthorpe had only asked him.'

Janet, indeed, might have given some evidence that would have borne more directly on the question. could have told how she had seen Paulina and her husband making up the case against Fielding time after time, and that she had noticed how adroitly Paulina modified her statement, improved, rounded it, and reduced it to symmetry and harmony in accordance with the slightest suggested hints or questions of Robert Charlton. But Janet could hardly be called upon to give testimony even in private bearing thus distinctly, if not directly, against her own husband; and in any case not many persons would have relied upon her judgment or her powers of observation; and many would assuredly have said that she was now furious against her husband, and glad to say anything to his discredit.

On the whole, then, the case stood thus as it was presented to the outer world. Only one person professed to have recognised the man calling himself Clarkson Fielding as the son of old Sir Jacob Fielding. Sir Wilberforce did not recognise him. Gabrielle Vanthorpe

was convinced, when she saw him first, that he was not Clarkson Fielding, but Philip Vanthorpe. She had sent for him to come to her house under the full conviction that he was the brother of her dead husband. Every act done by him since his coming to London was more consistent with the assumption that he was Philip Vanthorpe than that he was Clarkson Fielding. He had always carefully kept away from Sir Wilberforce Fielding until Gabrielle undertook to bring them together, and insisted on doing so. Then, with her to stand his sponsor on the first introduction, he had ventured to He had come between Sir Wilberforce and his intended marriage; for of course, as the knowing people said, it would never suit him to have the owner of the property married. He had been known by various names in various parts of the world; but they were names that would rather have served as a means of identification than a means of disguise to Clarkson Fielding. He had been known as Mr. Clarkson; he had been known as Mr. Selbridge. But Clarkson was the Christian name of the younger Fielding; Selbridge was his mother's name. What young man endeavouring to conceal his identity for any purpose would have

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taken these names? But they would have served the purpose of Philip Vanthorpe admirably; and Philip Vanthorpe had confessedly been a close friend of Clarkson Fielding. Again, it was certain that Clarkson Fielding had quarrelled with his father, in the first instance, because Sir Jacob had imposed the name of Clarkson on him. Was it likely that he would make the name more conspicuously than ever his own?

The balance of opinion, therefore, leaned heavily against Clarkson Fielding and in favour of Paulina's story. Paulina, too, had the great advantage of telling it for the most part in her own way. She did not say much about the hostility Fielding had always displayed towards her, and the manner in which he had endeavoured to rescue Gabrielle from any companionship with her. When she had to touch on all this part of the case, she explained it her own way, after a fashion we have already described, and which, indeed, had been suggested by one or two questions from Charlton.

Gabrielle, of course, never spoke on the subject to any but her most intimate friends, who were very few. One of these was Lady Honeybell.

'I think, Lady Honeybell, I had better go back to

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my own house while all this is going on; it is my own
house still.'

- 'Why should you do that, my dear young woman? You are better here, I think. It would never do for you to be living alone in that way while all this, as you say, is going on. No, no; I have got you here, and here for the present I mean to keep you. I'll do what your mother would do, if you had one.'
- 'But I am afraid I bring annoyance on you and disturb you; and then, Lady Honeybell, I am sometimes not quite sure that you are entirely with me in this.'
 - 'Entirely with you in what?'
- 'Well, of course I can't blame you; I can't wonder; you don't know him as I do; you can't feel to him as I do——'
 - 'Eh, surely no,' Lady Honeybell gravely admitted.
- 'And I am sometimes afraid that you join with the people who think I am unwise and doing wrong, and who don't believe in him as I do—as I do.'
- 'My dear,' Lady Honeybell answered soothingly, 'I should be anxious to believe everything you believed and to like everyone you liked, especially at a time like

this. But it is quite enough for me in this case that Sir Wilberforce Fielding believes in this young man, and that Major Leven is positive on the subject. I put you out of the question—your opinions, I mean; you are not in a condition to judge. But I am satisfied with the declarations of these men; I don't think the word of that woman counts for anything. But still I think you are bound in duty to yourself to be very careful how you act; and you are not at all the woman to be cautious in anything. That is why I am glad I have you safely here. We must have no marryings and no engagements while this thing is unsettled.'

- 'If he thought I had any doubt of him ——' Gabrielle began, with tears in her eyes.
- 'But, my dear young woman, goodness gracious! how could he possibly think you had any doubt of him? Why, you go on to him as though you thought ten thousand times more of him than ever.'
 - 'So I do, Lady Honeybell,' Gabrielle said warmly.

Gabrielle sickened at the whole scandal. She was made miserable by the thought of her lover being called on to prove anything to anybody. It was enough for

her that he said 'This is so;' she would have had it enough for all the world besides. At least, she would have wished that he and she could act with absolute indifference to the opinion of the rest of the world. What did it matter to them, she often thought, if a wicked woman chose to invent monstrous lies? She was hardly patient with Major Leven, for all his kindness, when he came to implore her to have the whole scandal disposed of once for all before she entered into any engagement with Fielding. She was almost inclined to complain of Fielding himself, because he was evidently determined to act as Major Leven advised her to act, and have the whole thing disposed of before he allowed Gabrielle to stand too far committed to him in the eyes of the world. Fielding did not very often come to see her these days. They were very melancholy days to Gabrielle. The sweet sanctity of their love seemed to her to have been cruelly profaned by all this vulgar, hideous controversy, this prospect of fending and proving. These days we now speak of were very few. At an ordinary time they would have passed so unnoticed away that before long Gabrielle would have ceased to have any idea of their number. But

now they seemed to make up a whole season of melancholy, impatience, anxiety, and pain.

Gabrielle was distracted from the thought of her own trouble when Mrs. Bramble came one day to tell her that Janet was with her; that she had left her husband, and declared she would not go back to him. He had been very bad to her, Mrs. Bramble said; although Janet had not explained to her exactly what it was all about.

'She hasn't cared about him this long time,' Mrs. Bramble went on to say. 'I knew it, though she wouldn't let on even to me. I know he must have been very bad to turn her so against him. She used to be fond of him once; and she's such a good girl. I wish she had never seen him; and so does she now.'

'I'll go to see her,' Gabrielle said. 'Perhaps she'll tell me. It seems a dreadful thing her leaving her husband in that way; but I know it can't be Janet's fault. I'll go to her at once.'

But Mrs. Bramble explained that Janet would not see anyone just yet; that she had begged to be left quite alone for the present; and had even said that she could not yet open her mind to Mrs. Vanthorpe. 'And she

'TIS A QUICK LIE: 'TWILL AWAY AGAIN.' 141 loves you, ma'am, more than anyone else in the world —now.'

Gabrielle was not astonished to find that something had gone wrong between Janet and her husband. She thought with melancholy reflection of the days when first she used to go to see them, and of the schemes she had for making them happy. How many dreamblossoms had she nourished; how few had ever ripened!

Her heart leaped up with joy one evening when her lover came to see her. He came so seldom now! He was so careful on her account! He kept away almost as if he had some fever in his veins that his mere presence might impart to her. And she—why, if there were such a fever, she would have liked to share it; at least, she would have welcomed the risk rather than lose an hour of his presence. 'I should never do to be a man,' Gabrielle thought; 'I never could be so prudent and considerate even for one I loved.'

'Gabrielle,' Fielding said, 'we begin to see our way at last. We can only meet this thing in one way. Major Leven and I are going out to New Orleans at once. We shall follow the track of poor Philip Vanthorpe, and get among those who knew him and knew

me; and then we'll come back and crush this ridiculous story at once. Just now we can't do anything. This unfortunate woman hasn't put herself directly in the way of a prosecution yet; and even if she did, we haven't the means of putting her story completely down. The whole thing is only a farce; but for our own sakes we must allow it to have for the time the proportions of a melodrama.' He said some words of encouragement and love to her; told her how the time would be short until he came back again; put on a cheery face, and declared that he knew she had courage for anything.

Even he was for a moment surprised to see how her eyes lighted and her cheeks got colour. In place of looking depressed, she had become all radiant. She felt as if a burden of stone were raised off her heart. For she too saw her way now. She had formed a resolution, and she was happy.

CHAPTER IX.

WE WILL HAVE NO MORE MARRIAGES.'

GABRIELLE was in such good spirits that she was even inclined to trifle a little with her lover's evident perplexity.

'Did you ever read any of Plutarch?' she asked him suddenly.

He was amazed; but he was equal to the occasion, and answered with perfect gravity:

'Yes, I read a good deal of Plutarch, long ago. Generals and great soldiers of all kinds usually carry copies of Plutarch about with them in their campaigning; so their biographers always tell us. They are the kind of generals who always sleep on little iron bedsteads at home, no matter what splendour may be all around them. I always associate Plutarch with great generals and iron bedsteads.'

- 'I found an old translation of Plutarch at home long ago, and I used to be very fond of reading it. I used to like the life of Alexander very much. Didn't you like the life of Alexander?'
- 'Immensely; and also that of Numa Pompilius: to say nothing of Martinus Scriblerus, and Thomas Diafoirus.'
- 'No; these are not in Plutarch. But do you remember about Alexander and his friend the physician?'
- 'I do remember it. But just now I had rather you spoke to me as if I didn't.' He knew she had some serious meaning, and he was anxious to get at it as soon as possible.
- 'Well, Alexander was sick, and he had a friend a physician, whom he loved and trusted. I am like Alexander in that; I have a friend whom I love and trust—'

She stopped.

- 'Tell me the rest,' Clarkson said.
- 'Yes; the physician was to cure him with some draught, and just then Alexander got a secret message warning him that the friend was false and meant to

poison him. He read the letter, and he showed it to no one. The physician came with the draught. Alexander looked into his eyes and drank all that was in the cup; and then he showed the letter.'

She stopped again.

- 'Yes, Gabrielle?'
- 'Oh, don't you see?' she asked impatiently.
 'Where would have been the proof of his faith in his friend if he had shown him the letter and questioned him before he swallowed the draught? Very well, you must let me be Alexander now.'

She held out her hand to him and he pressed it to his lips. He began to understand her little classical allegory.

'Go to New Orleans, my friend,' she said, 'find out all you can and all you like; prove anything you will for the satisfaction of the world and yourself, if you care about it; but you shall not prove anything for me. No one ever shall say that I waited for any evidence. You must make me your wife before you go, or I will never be your wife at all. Nothing on earth shall make me change from this resolution. If you refuse this proof of my confidence in you, you refuse me.'

What could Fielding do? Was it likely he would refuse this proof of her confidence, or endeavour to reason her into caution? It gave him a feeling of joy and of pride such as he had scarcely had even when first he knew that she loved him. The more likely it was that all her friends and their little world would think her rash, the more he loved her for her trust, and the more he felt that he must for ever be worthy of it. pledged himself to her in one or two simple words that he would never take one step or travel one mile to prove Paulina's story false until he had made her his wife, who would most of all human beings become a victim if that so-called story were to prove true. He left her that evening happy, proud, and humbled. He was deeply humbled in all his joy and his pride because he could not see how he could ever make himself truly worthy of her. A certain sensation of fear, utterly unknown before to his easy, careless nature, began to take possession of him. Suppose he were to die and leave her—what grief that would be to her! by some strange concurrence of evil fates he found himself unable to establish his own identity to the satisfaction of all the world? He had read of such things.

The controversy about Sebastian of Portugal, dear to our grandmothers who read romances, has never been settled. Suppose falsehood and wickedness were for once to win the day against him and against Gabrielle, and people were to believe that he had wronged beyond measure of words that most generous and trusting woman? Suppose that while he was away in New Orleans, Gabrielle were to die? He tortured himself with vain irrepressible doubts and fears. It is thus with the purest happiness man can have. Like the miser's money, the despot's ill-gotten power, it brings its torturing anxieties with it. We have got it—can we keep it? Is it to be stolen from us—torn from us? Are there not threats and dangers here, there, all around?

Strangely, perhaps, such doubts just now hardly intruded themselves on Gabrielle at all. She had become a different woman since she had made her compact with her lover. She had for some days been looking depressed and spiritless; quite unlike her old self. Now she was all brightness and high spirits again. She feared nothing; distrusted nothing; was satisfied that all would come well with her and her

Lady Honeybell was surprised and delighted at the change. The gladness of the young woman touched her. There was a good deal of the sentimental still left in Lady Honeybell's nature, amid much shrewd sense and perhaps a little tendency to flightiness in patronage and favouritism. She found her house made more happy while Gabrielle was there. She was delighted to see Gabrielle in good spirits again; and she set the change down to the fact that Major Leven had frankly taken up Fielding's cause and was about to go with him to New Orleans to find out the evidences of its truth. She had no idea of Gabrielle's resolve, and would have been much alarmed if she had known of it. Her sentiment would never have carried her the length of giving encouragement to the marriage of any woman on such trust as that which seemed to Gabrielle only the rightful tribute of one who really loved a man. Nor would Gabrielle be satisfied with any secret marriage. It was not enough for her that she believed in Fielding and was willing to stake all on her belief. She must have her friends as well to see that she had such implicit faith. Nor would Fielding for his part have consented to any secresy. He was content to

wait, while it was not certain that Gabrielle was willing to give so signal a proof of her faith in him; but now since she had declared her resolution he felt that it would be unjust to her to allow of any secresy about their marriage. The more he thought over it, the more he felt convinced that in no way could the growing scandal be more bravely and wisely met than by his open public marriage with Gabrielle.

Gabrielle felt proud and happy. If anything could have been needed to complete the happiness of her love, it was an opportunity of proving her confidence in her lover; and now even this had come. When Lady Honeybell and almost everyone else at first opposed the idea, and urged her even for the mere form's sake to wait until her lover's identity had been fully established and his character cleared, she was glad that they did so, because their remonstrances made the firmness of her purpose more apparent. Nothing on earth, she declared, should induce her to wait for any proof or evidence. Who proves, doubts, she declared in triumph. She was so happy then that she instantly fell to thinking she was bound to earn her own happiness by forthwith doing or trying to do something to make others happy.

Her thoughts turned to poor Janet Charlton, living her lonely miserable life apart from her husband. Gabrielle made up her mind that she would do her best to bring that pair together again. She was sure Robert Charlton must be the one in the wrong. But she was sure too that he had some principle of good in him, and she resolved to seek it out and make her appeal to it. She would send for him; he must come to her; she would meet him with confidence, and address herself to his spirit of self-respect and of manhood; she would find out what had happened between Janet and him; and it should go hard if she did not restore them to each other. This should be her apology to the powers above for being happy and for delighting in her happiness.

One day Gabrielle had a visit from Claudia Lemuel. It was long since she had seen the little pessimist; and she was glad to see her now. Claudia came out of pure good-nature, for she had long given up all hopes of Gabrielle as a supporter of any great cause for the advancement of the human race through the remodelling of the social and political laws which deprive woman of her just ascendancy. Nothing could have better

proved the ingrained liberality of thought which lived beneath all Claudia's little pedantries than her friendship for Gabrielle, because she could seldom help regarding as a sort of traitress to her sex any woman who openly professed, as Gabrielle did, a great esteem and regard for the creature called man, and was willing to acknowledge in a certain sense his title to supremacy. Curiously enough, Gabrielle had never had an opportunity of doing the smallest kindness for Claudia, who nevertheless liked her greatly; and she had heaped kindness on Miss Elvin, who detested her.

Claudia had heard some rumour about Gabrielle which not a little troubled her. She had some other trouble on her mind of the same sort as well. Gabrielle saw from the first moment of their meeting that something was pressing down the spirit of her friend. The cause of pessimism she supposed was going wrong somehow; or perhaps Mrs. Lemuel had not been lately heard of, and was to be explored for in Africa like another Livingstone.

'And you are going to be married?' Claudia said in tones of deep compassion.

- 'Yes, Claudia, I am going to be married. Won't you congratulate me?'
- 'I should like you to be happy,' Claudia said meditatively. 'I am sure you will believe I am sincere in that. But I don't know that I ought to congratulate you. That would seem wanting in principle on my part, would it not?'
 - 'Why wanting in principle, Claudia?'
- 'Well, it is forfeiting a woman's independence to get married. I can't approve of that. I think women would have so much a nobler destiny if they were independent.'
- 'I have tried independence, Claudia, and I don't know that anything very noble came of it.'
- 'But there might have been—oh, surely yes, there might have been, if you had but understood your own capabilities in life and exerted them. Pray, Mrs. Vanthorpe, don't think it rude of me if I talk in this way. It is only because I think you have so much capacity for doing good and great things, if you would only try. I don't mind frivolous women getting married; but the really earnest and capable—they ought to keep their independence and their oppor-

tunities of doing good. And I suppose you will even change your name?'

- 'Indeed yes, Claudia—if you mean that I will take his name.'
- 'Well, now, that I do think is a pity,' Claudia said with great earnestness. 'On that point I may argue, may I not?'
- 'Oh yes, Claudia, by all means. But I am afraid you will find me very wrong-headed and hard to convince. Why should I not take my husband's name? What harm is there in that?'
- 'It is an acknowledgment of a woman's complete absorption in a man, as if she were never to have any being or any rights separate from him. It is such a confession of inferiority. Why should he not take your name?'
- 'I really don't know,' Gabrielle said. 'Because it isn't the custom, I suppose. I believe there are places where the men do take their wives' names, to distinguish them from other men. I don't see how it matters either way.'
- 'Oh yes, Mrs. Vanthorpe, surely yes. For one thing, it is a confession of inferiority; or rather I

should say a profession of inferiority; for I don't admit that we are inferior, or can truly confess ourselves to be such. And then it is an untruth. Your name is not his name. The name you got on coming into the world is your name. To assume any other name is to sanction a departure from the truth; it is to give one another encouragement to the falsehoods of our human system. Why, why will women consent to marry!'

Claudia was so bitter against matrimony that Gabrielle could not help fancying there must be some special reason just then for her bitterness. Could it be that she was only soured in the vulgar way because no one had yet asked her to marry him? Gabrielle thought better of the girl, somehow, than that. In order to turn the talk away from this painful subject, she asked Claudia when she had heard from her mother. Claudia winced, and almost shuddered.

'I heard from her yesterday,' she said. 'Oh, it is really too dreadful! I am ashamed of women.'

Gabrielle's surprised eyes asked for some explanation of this outburst.

'Mamma writes to me from Zanzibar,' Claudia said;

'she tells me she has got married! to an American traveller! at her time of life! And when she might have made good use of woman's independence! I feel it so deeply. She says she only knew him a fortnight. She met him somewhere in her travels through Africa; and now they are married; and they are bringing out a book of travels together. She has taken his name. She calls herself Mrs. Fullager. He is a Dr. Fullager. The book is to be by Dr. and Mrs. Fullager.'

Gabrielle was not surprised so much now at poor Claudia's invectives against matrimony.

'Well, Claudia,' she said, trying to make the best of it, 'I suppose your mother understands what she needs for her own happiness better than anyone could know for her. It is not much of a loss to you; I mean, she was not much with you.'

'No, our ways were very much apart; it isn't that I feel so much about. It is the giving up of a principle. Why must there be nothing but marrying? There was a friend of mine—a man—oh, such a valued and useful friend, so full of principle and high purpose; such a noble creature; we all so respected him.

I mean, we women who think deeply on our position and our future. He went with us in everything. And now what does he do? He wants to get married! Nothing will do for him but to talk of getting married.'

Another grievance, Gabrielle thought. Perhaps in her heart poor Claudia felt too warmly towards this model man; and now he proposes to another! No wonder the poor little maid is rather sore on the subject of marriage.

- 'I suppose it is the common weakness of humanity, Claudia. You must forgive us all. And this misguided friend of yours—is he married?'
- 'Oh, no,' Claudia said indignantly, and with a slight flush on her cheek; 'he is not indeed.'
- 'Was he refused—or was he reasoned out of his folly?'
- 'He was refused; he was refused in the most decisive manner. He will not attempt such a thing again, I venture to think.'
- 'Poor fellow! I am quite sorry for him. Who was the girl? is it a secret?'
 - 'I was the girl,' said Claudia. 'I told him what I

thought of his offer. I was in no mood for such things just then—he came to me the very moment after I had received mamma's letter announcing her marriage.

'That was an unlucky moment indeed,' said Gabrielle, hardly able to repress a smile. 'But if I knew him, Claudia, I think I should advise him not wholly to despair. I think I should recommend him to approach you at some other time, when the effect of your mamma's announcement is not quite so strong on your mind. You speak so highly of him, that I am sure he must be worthy of you and would make you a good husband.'

'I always thought highly of him until that moment,' Claudia admitted. 'I thought he had too earnest a soul for such weakness as that. I told him so.'

'Ah, well, I don't think, somehow, he can feel quite despondent,' Gabrielle said. 'If I should ever come to know him, I shall tell him what I think he ought to do, Claudia.'

Gabrielle felt reassured as to the future of poor Claudia. It did seem hard on the child at first that her mother should have married again at such a time of life and left her. But Claudia's subsequent revelation made things look brighter. The noble young man with the earnest soul will ask again, Gabrielle thought; and Claudia will prove an adoring wife one of these days; and her sisters in the cause will mourn over her fall.

CHAPTER X.

PAULINA PUTS HER FOOT IN IT.

An ominous calmness prevailed for some days in Gabrielle's little world. Nothing was going on, to all appearance, as regarded Paulina and her plot. It was ceasing to be talked about among the people Gabrielle knew. Some had only heard of it in a vague way, and began now to think there was no truth in the story of any such accusation having been made by the odd woman who spoke at public meetings. Clarkson Fielding was seen with Sir Wilberforce almost every day. They rode in the park together, and often paid visits to Lady Honeybell. Sir Wilberforce was very happy. One of the reasons, it will be remembered, why he had long hesitated about asking Gabrielle to marry him was that he feared if she should refuse him he would have to be shut out of her society for a long time, and

he liked her so much that this would have been a very severe privation to him. Now, however, things had so turned out that he could see her as often as he liked. She was to be his brother's wife; his sister-in-law. They would always be the closest friends. Sir Wilberforce came gradually to the sound conclusion that this was really better for him than marrying her. He called her 'Gabrielle' already; she called him 'Wilberforce.' He knew she liked him very much; she always told him so. He had, indeed, behaved with the most simple chivalry in the whole affair. He never felt the slightest doubt as to the falsehood of Paulina's story, and he entered at once into the meaning of Gabrielle's resolve to be married before any step was taken to prove it false.

'Quite right, quite right, Gabrielle; just the proper thing to do; she always knows best, Clarkson. It would never do for you and me, Gabrielle, to have it said that we wanted Clarkson to prove anything to satisfy us. No, no; never do. We'll have the marriage first; and then we'll go to work about the proofs and all that. Gad, I only hope that beastly woman won't bolt in the mean while. Shouldn't wonder if she did, you know. She'll want to escape punishment; but we must have her punished.'

Gabrielle in her heart wished Paulina would escape; would take herself off somehow. She shrank from the idea of inflicting criminal punishment on any woman, however bad; and as long as Clarkson and she were happy and Sir Wilberforce was content with them, she cared nothing for what anyone might say.

Therefore a curious quiet set in. It was useless to think of taking any proceedings against Paulina without the most distinct evidence of the falsehood of her story. Until this had been got, the less said or done the better. Up to the present, Paulina had done little more than write letters to various persons declaring that she was the wife of the man who now called himself Clarkson Fielding. Some of the persons thus addressed began after a while to regard her as a madwoman. They knew that Clarkson Fielding visited Gabrielle openly every day at Lady Honeybell's. That was enough for them.

Clarkson still paid his lonely visits to Gabrielle's house in the park. It was still unsettled as to the purpose to which Albert Vanthorpe's money was to be

devoted. Mrs. Leven, when addressed upon the subject. had resolutely declined to have anything to do with it. or even to offer any suggestion about it. She intimated through her husband that she would receive any or all the memorials of her dead son that Gabrielle might be willing to part with, and could no longer have any interest in: but she would do no more than that. declined to see Clarkson Fielding, or to offer any opinion as to whether he was or was not her eldest son. When her husband told her that she would probably have to give evidence in a court of law on the question, she calmly answered that she would wait until she was compelled to do so. The trip to the Pyrenees had to be put off indefinitely. Major Leven was making preparations to accompany Fielding to New Orleans. He had been seeing a good deal of Fielding lately, and had come to admire him very thoroughly. He too had been won over to the scheme of the immediate marriage. So for a few days things went very quietly on with Gabrielle and with her lover. Miss Elvin was extremely disappointed. She had been in full expectation of a splendid scandal; and now it began almost to seem as if nothing were going to

happen. She was afraid Paulina had disappeared altogether.

Paulina, however, had no notion of disappearing. She was impatient for an opportunity of asserting her-It was time that she made some new stroke for notoriety. The public whom she had charmed for a time—the peculiar part of the public, that is to say, which is always on the look-out for anyone with a grievance—was beginning to grow tired of her. were not only tired but scandalised. She had been taken up in the first instance a good deal by a certain advanced and sentimental section of the advocates of woman's rights. It was the creed of most of these ladies that in every dispute which could by any possibility arise between man and woman, the man must be in the wrong. A woman in any case ought to be assumed to be in the right. With such ladies, therefore, Paulina Vanthorpe was at first a sort of heroine. But, to do them justice, they were all women of thorough integrity and purity. They were well-bred women, for the most part—ladies in the true sense of the word. They soon became a little astonished at Paulina's manners. This, however, would not have greatly

affected her in their estimation; for who shall say that a woman is to be abandoned to injustice, and flung down a defenceless victim at the feet of man, merely because she breathes her aspirates occasionally in the wrong place, and uses her handkerchief a little too noisily? But after a while some of her patronesses began to entertain grave doubts about the whiteness of Paulina's Even her lies did not always seem exactly white. The sentimental advocates of women's rights began to shrink away from her. Furthermore, the wiser among them were well aware of the harm done to their cause by the exhibition of eccentric figures as its represen-Most of them, therefore, drew away from Paulina; and she seemed likely to have to fall back on that class of admirers who can always be interested in a woman's-rights advocate if she wears trousers; or who take up the representative of a grievance only after several courts of law have declared that he or she has no grievance at all, and that the only just fault to be found with society is that it has not long before consigned him or her to prison or madhouse.

Therefore, even if she had no other motive to spur the sides of her intent, Paulina would have been moved

to seek some new way of creating a sensation by the evident decay of her hold over what she grandiloquently called the public opinion of the English people. saw that something new must be attempted, and she had cleverness enough to know that if once she made herself the heroine of some astonishing story, some people would be found to believe her statement, even though arithmetical and mathematical evidence had given it the lie. Paulina loved notoriety almost as much as she loved revenge, and 'fizz,' and fine clothes. Her energetic soul was happy only when she was doing something—'kicking up a row,' as she called it. Therefore she looked forward with genuine delight to the prospect of the great struggle in which she was about to engage and the stupendous scandal of which she was to be the heroine.

She was not allowed, however, to remain an occupant of Fielding's rooms in Bolingbroke Place. A cool solicitor, employed at Major Leven's suggestion, came to the care-taker of the house, formally announced the expiration of Fielding's tenancy, paid duly up for the proper time of notice, and gave warning that Mr. Fielding had nothing whatever to do with the person

who claimed to be his wife, and whom he would probably have occasion to proceed against in a court of Paulina, therefore, had to go, or to be expelled by the rude hands of the police. Her own idea at first was in favour of the dramatic effect of the injured wife dragged from the hearth that ought to be hers, by the violent hands of the minions of the law. But the few advanced ladies who still held by her discouraged this idea altogether, and Robert Charlton, being appealed to, expressed utter disgust at the bare suggestion of it. Paulina therefore withdrew, rather reluctantly, and not without many doubts that a grand effect had been missed. She consoled herself by writing, or having written for her, a letter to the United States Minister in London, in which she represented herself as a lady from New Orleans who had been trapped into marriage with a British aristocrat, and was now made a victim by British law because of the machinations of her husband's powerful relatives. The United States Minister proved unworthy of his high place. He began by drily requesting through some underling the evidences of Paulina's nationality. These were not quite satisfactory, and when Paulina

undertook to supplement them he wrote again, still through the underling, to say that it would not be necessary to trouble her, inasmuch as in any case the United States did not claim the right to compel London lodging-house keepers to let their apartments to American ladies.

Paulina's committee—she had a committee already organised all to her own grievance—comprised one brave American lady, who was a professor of spiritualism, and a contributor to one of the leading journals of the city of New Padua in the United States-a city of which some readers may possibly remember to have heard before. This lady wrote a series of letters for that journal, in which she denounced the United States Minister in London as a disgrace to his country, as a man who made himself the tool and sycophant of the British aristocracy, and who had done what was in him to further the ends of a base conspiracy of that aristocracy against a noble and much-injured New Orleans lady. Her descriptions of Paulina's personal appearance were such as only the adulation of lovers would have applied to Marie Antoinette or the beautiful Gunnings. Short passages from them appeared as

paragraphs in the 'personal' columns of most of the American papers, and led to the impression in many Western States that Paulina Vanthorpe was the reigning beauty of Europe.

Paulina took quiet lodgings not far from Bolingbroke Place. She was in constant consultation with He always came to see her; she Robert Charlton. did not go to see him, not caring to obtrude her presence any more on the place from which she had been harshly expelled. Robert Charlton preferred in any case that she should not come to his rooms. did not want to be openly identified with her there. Besides, he did not wish her to know that his wife was no longer with him. He held by Paulina still, because he blamed Fielding for every misfortune that had come on him, or that he had brought on himself, and it soothed his soul to be a sharer in any effort to interfere with Fielding's happiness. He felt sure that Gabrielle Vanthorpe must hate and despise him now; and this thought made him desperate, made him long to do harm to somebody. He had visions of his wife being sheltered and made much of by Gabrielle, and of the two women denouncing and despising him. The un-

fortunate Charlton's feelings towards Gabrielle were strangely mixed. She was the only woman he had ever seen before whom he could have fallen down in admira-She was the only woman of that class who had Therefore ever treated him like a man and a brother. his head was turned by her; and at the same time he hated her, because she was of a higher class than he, and must therefore, he felt convinced, have looked down upon him even while she was kind to Some of Fielding's early chaff with Charlton about Gabrielle had genuine truth in it. He was a good deal of the 'Caliban-Robespierre-Desmoulins' order, as Fielding called it. He would have found some satisfaction in adjusting to the guillotine the neck of the prettiest and sweetest woman, if he fancied she had despised him in her days of pride. The lower he sank, the more he felt sure Gabrielle must despise him, and the more intense grew his anger towards her.

He was very poor. He got very little work to do now. He had been inattentive and idle of late; and an idea had gone abroad among his patrons, or those who once were his patrons, that he was given to drink—a very wrong idea, but which told heavily

against him. His odd ways and strange aggressive speech gave strength to the impression. He owed for the rent of his rooms; he did not know how to get the money, and the idea of being turned out, and of this coming to the ears of Janet and her people, who he presumed would exult over it, made him ready to encounter any degradation rather than that. So he went down one step more in meanness and borrowed money from Paulina. Paulina, to be sure, offered the loan, for she saw his uneasiness, and easily guessed at its cause, and volunteered a helping hand with the free way of a regular comrade. He had done her good service, she said, and why shouldn't she lend him money while she had it? 'Poor devils ought to help each other,' was her pithy way of expressing her sentiments. Charlton took the money, and hated her.

He made no effort to recover his wife. He knew where she had gone well enough; at least, he had no doubt upon the subject. It is one of the curious inconsistencies of human nature that the jealous should sometimes torment themselves and others with suspicions and accusations in which they have not really the slightest belief. Charlton knew that Janet was as

true and loval a wife as ever lived; and yet a word about anyone offering her any attention made him furious even in his best days, and in later days not alone made him furious, but made him vent his wrath in taunts and reproaches directed against the poor little woman herself. His jealous anger had lately been still more intensified by the consciousness that he was unworthy of her, and that a woman of any feeling and spirit could not help despising him. had gone down from meanness to meanness until now he recognised himself the depth of his descent and did not believe that it could be recovered. So he allowed Janet to pass away out of his life, as every good purpose and manly hope had passed out of it. He did not think that they could ever live together again: and now he preferred not to see her or hear from her any more. Sometimes, when he had been wandering about the streets, and came home—if that wretched place could be called a home—he was almost afraid that Janet might have been stricken with pity for him and so have come back.

Meanwhile, it puzzled and alarmed him not a little that he heard of no movement being made by Fielding. Paulina's enemies appeared to be going on just as though she were not in existence. She had now written letters to everyone who could possibly be supposed to have the remotest interest in the case; she had formed a committee to assist her in the redress of her wrongs; she had spread her story as widely as she could: and the other side,' as she called it, had not yet taken the slightest notice of her. Mrs. Leven had not even acknowledged the receipt of her letters. To Charlton this appeared gravely ominous. He began to feel more and more convinced that 'the other side' saw its way only too clearly, and was simply biding its time to come down on Paulina, and perhaps on him too, with the heavy hand of the criminal law. Paulina, on the other hand, was what she would herself have called 'chirpy.'

'They daren't meet me,' she declared. 'That marriage is off, you'll find.'

Charlton made up his mind that he would, once for all, get to the truth or untruth of Paulina's story. She had him in her power now; and he determined that he would either have her in his power or he would at least satisfy himself that he was right in taking up her cause. He thought long over a conclusive test by which to try her story. He paid her a hasty visit one day and found her alone.

'I say, we must be doing something,' he said. 'I hear the other side's preparing a move. We ought to strike the first blow, don't you think?'

'Soon as you like, old man; only tell us the blow to strike. We've been letting them have it a good deal already, haven't we?

'Yes, but I hear many things, you know,' he said coolly; 'my wife is staying with her aunt, Mrs. Bramble, in Mrs. Vanthorpe's house; and she gets to know things.' This story lent him an opportunity of giving a plausible explanation of Janet's absence, in case Paulina should hear of it.

'Oh, and tells you all she hears? I say, ain't she a trump of a little woman! I never thought she had the cleverness—and I didn't think she'd have done it, anyhow; she seemed so infatuated about one who shall be nameless. Eh, Charlton? Don't be angry, my dear boy; it's as bad for me as it is for you, if there's anything to be said about it at all. Well, get on. So we have a spy in the enemy's camp? Lord, how nice!'

- 'Suppose they were going to get married, what would you do?' Charlton asked.
- 'Present myself at the church, and stop the business,' Paulina answered promptly.
- 'Well, but you know that your mere word would not exactly do. It may carry conviction to my mind,' he said, with a sneer which he did not try to hide; 'but it might not to those who did not know you quite so well. You have some proofs at hand?'
- 'Of course I have,' the undaunted Paulina answered without a moment's hesitation.
- 'I hear,' he went on in a low tone, 'that they are very anxious about some letter that Clarkson Fielding once wrote to you and your husband. I fancy it was a farewell letter written to you when he was on the point of death, saying something about his brother and England and all that sort of thing. I hear about it in this way. Our gentleman, your husband up yonder, I am told volunteers an explanation of this; he fancies, I believe, that you have it in your possession ready to produce.'

Paulina tossed her head knowingly as if she meant to say, 'Just wait and you'll see.' She did not quite understand the drift of the matter yet, and therefore would not commit herself.

- 'He tries to explain it now,' Charlton said.
- 'Oh, does he? I should just like to see him.'
- 'Yes, he says he only wrote it as a practical joke, and that he never had the faintest notion of dying. You see, he still insists that he is Clarkson Fielding and not your husband. He says you are going to bring out this letter which he wrote as a mere joke, and offer it as a regular death-bed farewell and a proof that the writer is really dead. He wants to be beforehand with his explanation.'
- 'Oh! does he, though? He won't succeed, though. I see his dodge well enough.'
 - 'Then it was really a death-bed farewell?'
- 'Why, of course it was. Poor Clarkson was dying, and he knew it, dear boy; and he wrote to me.'
- 'To both of you, was it not? you and your husband together.'
 - 'Yes, yes; didn't I say so?'
- 'You did, certainly. I suppose, when your husband gave it to you to keep, he had not much idea that he

would ever have any occasion to pass himself off as Clarkson Fielding?'

- 'Not a bit of it. He only thought of that after, and when we were still in partnership.'
- 'If you had that letter,' Charlton said meditatively, 'I fancy it would be a great blow for them.'
- 'Of course I have it,' Paulina answered unhesitatingly. 'You don't suppose I was going to allow a thing like that to go losing?'
- 'Why, no,' Charlton said, 'it is rather too important for that. I saw its importance first from the efforts he was making to explain it away in advance and make it out a practical joke. But I wonder you never told me before.'
- 'Man! do you think I can keep everything in my head? I have lots of proofs as good as that; and I have that too.'
- 'That's a capital thing for us. And it was just such a letter as I say—taking a farewell of you both as his closest friends, and telling you he was on the point of death?'
 - Just that,' Paulina coolly replied. 'Every word is engraven on my memory. Poor Clarkson!'

- 'Have you it with you here?'
- 'Well, no; not exactly here. But I have it all the same. I was reading it over the other day. Poor Clarkson! He was a good chap.'
 - 'How lucky that you kept it!' Charlton said.
 - 'Ain't it, just?' she answered.
- 'If it were lost,' Charlton went on slowly, 'I suppose you could dictate it all over again to me?'
- 'Every word,' the guileless Paulina proudly declared.
- 'I don't see what harm there would be in restoring it—writing it out again, from your dictation, with the proper dates and all that—always supposing that it should have been mislaid somewhere, and of course always supposing that you are perfectly certain there was such a letter and certain of all its contents. Are you perfectly certain about all that?'
- 'Why, of course I am. Didn't I tell you again and again that I was? I know where to put my hand upon it in a moment; at least, I'm sure I do. But of course if I can't just find it, why then, it would be quite proper to supply its place as you say.'
 - 'All I want to be certain of,' Charlton said emphati-

- cally, 'is that there is such a letter; and of course I am certain of that now. I suppose you have read it over often?'
- 'Hundreds of times—shed many a tear over it too.'
- 'I dare say; very natural. Well, it is a great score in your favour to have that letter. We might never have known how valuable it was only for his fears about it.'
- 'His conscience betrayed him,' Paulina said grandly.

Charlton knew it all now. He knew that he had to deal with an impostor of the coarsest kind. There was no such letter as that he talked of; he had invented the whole story of it to try Paulina; and he saw how she jumped at it with an eagerness which only the most audacious impostor would have shown. It was almost childish, the unthinking manner in which she allowed herself to be drawn into such an exposure of her falsehood. Charlton had had doubts before, amounting at moments to something like conviction; but he had not had actual conviction until now. He now saw himself entered as the confederate of a

brazen-faced and vulgar impostor; destined perhaps to share the punishment that would most certainly await her. To this he had sunk step by step. From the first mean action, even from the first indulgence of a mean motive or suspicion, the descent had been by a logical process of successive steps. As he went to his lonely lodging that night, he was thinking whether he could do anything better than commit suicide. To denounce Paulina and expose her would hardly now restore him to the good opinion of any decent creature. He regarded himself as lost beyond all depth. The very trick by which he had detected Paulina was in itself hardly worthy of a man. The truth, too, must be spoken: he feared Paulina and her possible revenge. He had a nervous dread of her much greater than he would have had of a man. His was a nervous and a feeble nature altogether; most or many of his offences came in the first instance from want of animal spirits and animal courage. He had more than once thought that it is easy for those to be virtuous who are brave. Many men and women might have acknowledged to themselves the melancholy truth of the reflection. is easy to speak the truth when one has the nerves

that do not shrink from any little explosion that may follow. The moral descent often begins in the first shrinking from a slight trouble of this kind. Becky Sharp saw no difficulty in being virtuous on ten thousand a year. Many a broken-down and degraded creature would once have found it easy enough to be truthful and honest if he could only have commanded his nerves and ordered his heart to be calm. Robert Charlton was afraid of the stalwart fury whom he had allowed to gain an ascendancy over him. He thought of exposing her and then committing suicide. He thought of throwing himself on the generosity of Gabrielle. He thought of this again and again. But he feared that in Fielding he would find no mercy, and that Gabrielle would spurn him.

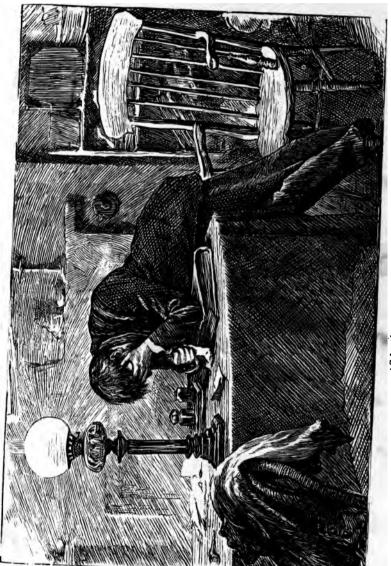
He entered his miserable room. It looked wretchedly lonely. It was late and dark. A drizzling rain had been falling, and he was wet; and there was no fire. He struck a match and lit his lamp. The place seemed even more cheerless now. There was the seat where poor Janet used to sit; poor Janet! she was very fond of him once; and now she despised him. There, near to her, he used to sit and do his

work in those early days—not, truly, so far away—when he yet had ambition, and hoped to rise to be something of an artist, a real artist, not a mere handicrafts—man; and when he believed he could make Janet happy and give her a home worthy of her, and when he used to love to see her let down her golden hair. He had treated her badly, he began now to feel. He had made her miserable with mean jealousies; and then he had taken to despising her and snubbing her because she was not clever, and educated, and a lady. She would have stood by him in any poverty or trial, he was sure: and she would always have admired him and thought him a great man. Well, well, no use thinking about all that now.

His eyes wandering about the room turned to the door with its little letter-box; and he saw that there was a letter in the box. He got up listlessly and took out the letter. He knew the hand-writing well. It was that of Gabrielle Vanthorpe. He found a few kindly lines from Gabrielle saying that he must excuse her if she intruded, but that she had been deeply pained to hear that Janet and he were not happy now, that she had set her heart on bringing them together,

and begging that he would come and see her next day, not at Lady Honeybell's, but at her own house. It was plain that she at least had no suspicion of the part he was playing as Paulina's accomplice. She at least believed him worthy of something yet. The thought was too much for the unhappy creature; he sat down and burst into tears.

At that same moment Janet was gliding mournfully through the empty rooms of Gabrielle's deserted house. The rooms looked ghostly in the misty atmosphere of the damp evening. Poor Janet came into the room where she had been with her husband on that memorable night when she thought things were to go so happily for him and for her, and when Gabrielle seemed like some heaven-commissioned angel sent to make their lives bright. She was thinking sadly of the change that had come over her husband of late, and of the hard bitter life she had lately had with him. How it all began she could not understand; but she knew that she could bear it no longer. It was strange, she thought, that he had never tried to find her out. He might have guessed, he must have known, where she was; she had for days been in great personal fear that



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he would come to drag her back. Now that there seemed no ground for such a fear, she tormented herself with wondering why he had allowed her to pass thus quietly out of his life. Suddenly she heard a step on the stairs outside, and she shrank into a corner in a kind of terror. A man came in. She was on the point of giving a little scream, why she could not have told, perhaps with some wild nervous idea that it might be Robert come in search of her. It was Mr. Fielding. He started at seeing her.

- 'Janet!' he said with surprise—'Mrs. Charlton!'
- 'You didn't expect to see me here, Mr. Fielding,' she said in trembling tone.
- 'Well, I didn't expect to see you, perhaps, in this room just now, but I think I had a sort of belief that you were somewhere sheltered in the house. I have heard something of what has happened. I am very, very sorry for it.'

He spoke so gravely and so kindly that the tears came rushing into Janet's eyes. All his old easy familiarity of manner was changed into a quiet respectful way that her instincts enabled her to under-

stand. Her sorrow, her loneliness, her unprotected condition gave her in his eyes a new title to respect.

'Can nothing be done?' he began; 'but no, I shan't ask you anything about it, Mrs. Charlton; I know that Gabrielle hopes and believes she can do something, and she is better qualified than I or any man could be. Do you know that I come here every evening only for the purpose of sitting a little in this room because she used to sit there; your aunt lets me in; she humours me, and is so kind.'

'Oh, Mr. Fielding,' Janet exclaimed, 'how I wish you joy, and her! You were always so good to me. You ought to be happy; she and you!'

Then she broke down and hurried out of the room, and was scolded by her aunt for having gone into it at such a time.

CHAPTER XI.

'AT ONE O'CLOCK TO-MORROW.'

GABRIELLE returned for once to her old home. She had thought it best for many reasons to see Robert Charlton there. One reason was because she hoped to accomplish her end so completely that she could bring Janet and her husband together in a moment. She hoped to see them go out of the house reconciled, arm-in-arm; 'and then,' she thought, 'it will be time to have done with the place; it will have served a last good purpose for me, and may well pass into other hands.'

There was something oppressive to her good spirits in the atmosphere of the lonely house. As she passed from this room into that, she felt as if she should not be surprised to see a ghost cowering on each hearth. She went into the memorial room, and was ready to sigh over the vanity which would perpetuate a sentiment by means of a few symbols. She was glad that all the things there were to be sent to Mrs. Leven, to whom alone they would now rightly belong. Then the house would be disposed of after a while, and Gabrielle would feel herself free thenceforward of all its unwelcome obligations and its mournful memories. She would be free to think of it ever after only as the happy place where she first learned that Clarkson Fielding loved her, and where she acknowledged her love for him and to him.

But she still thought it possible that she might persuade 'the Charltons to occupy the place for some time, until the scheme for Charlton's becoming a Westend success should be in a fair way towards accomplishment. She had been greatly impressed by some words of Fielding's about Charlton, and men of his morbid nature. 'Such men would be very good fellows in prosperity; it was the wind of adversity that drew out all the sour bad qualities in them. The snow resting on them brings out the flavour of some fruits, but it destroys that of others; and Charlton's is a nature that can't stand the frost. Warm him up in the

sunshine of a little prosperity, and he would be sure to come all right. What we call cynicism and ill-nature in some fellows, Gabrielle, is often only the physical effect of want of success; just as we sometimes fancy a friend is out of humour with us, when he is only suffering from the tooth-ache.'

Gabrielle felt convinced that if she could put a little prosperity in Charlton's way he would become a good husband and a happy man. She did not think there was anything bad in him. Of any treachery towards herself and Fielding she had not the slightest idea. She never thought of anyone being treacherous. She felt that she should have earned a title to be happy herself, and should have propitiated the powers above, if she could succeed before she left England in reconciling Janet and her husband, and at least opening for them the door to prosperity.

She did not ask to see Janet. She did not even ask Mrs. Bramble if Janet was then in the house. This rather surprised Mrs. Bramble, who, however, only assumed that Gabrielle had too much to think of concerning herself to have any time left for thinking about Janet. Gabrielle did not say why she thus suddenly

presented herself in her old home; she only told Mrs. Bramble that if anyone came to see her he was to be shown in to her at once. Knowing the jealous temperament of the unhappy Charlton, she felt that her enterprise would have much better chance of success if she could tell him at once that Janet had nothing to do with it; that she had not spoken with the little woman, or even seen her. 'He will come, surely?' she said to herself from time to time. She was as anxious about his coming, and about the success of her attempt, as another woman might have been about a presentation at Court, or her first experiment in private theatricals. She wandered about the rooms restlessly, waiting for him to come. She had herself come to the trysting-place long before the hour appointed. She might have been a girl waiting for her lover, instead of a kindly impulsive woman trying to do some good for a poor broken-down and feather-headed worker in one of the lowest of the artistic grades. She positively trembled with emotion when at last she was told that Mr. Charlton begged to be allowed to speak a few words with her, and would not detain her long. 'No; but I will detain him longer than he thinks, perhaps,' she said to herself in great good-humour at the promising omen given by his ready obedience to her summons.

His appearance somewhat shocked her. He was looking haggard and broken-down. There was a furtive, cowering way about him, half-defiant, half-fearful, which she could not understand. He was slovenly and careless in his dress—a thing unusual in him—and his small, thin, girlish hands had a sickly look. He stood a moment at the threshold of the room and looked nervously in, as if he expected or feared to see someone else there. So manifest was the meaning of his look, that Gabrielle replied to it as though it had been something spoken.

'Come in, Mr. Charlton; there is no one here but myself. I was anxious to say a few words to you alone.'

He came in slowly, still glancing round him as a man might do who fancied that he was being drawn into an ambush. This made Gabrielle a little impatient.

'May I ask you to take a seat, Mr. Charlton? I dare say you can guess why I sent for you?

- 'About Janet?' he said, with a weak attempt at a smile.
 - 'About Janet, yes.'
 - 'She has spoken to you, perhaps?'
- 'No; I have not seen her since I saw her last in your room; and I have not heard from her.'

He bent his head, but said nothing.

- 'I do so want to bring you and Janet together again. I do so wish to be the means of doing that much good. I can't believe there is any reason why you should not be brought together. I know there is nothing in her that is not good, and sweet, and true; and indeed I can't believe anything bad of you. Let me send for Janet.'
 - 'It is too late,' he said.
- 'Too late, Mr. Charlton? Why, what folly! You talk as if you and she were separated by some gulf——'
 - 'So we are,' he said gloomily.
- 'Oh, no, there is no gulf separating man and wife but death, or some evil of which you are no more capable than she. I don't believe anything bad of you.'

- 'If you did but know---'
- 'Well, I don't know. Tell me, trust to me. I have taken an interest in you for a long time. I always associate you with Bolingbroke Place, and days that if I lived a thousand years would always be dear to me. I was very anxious to do something to make you two happy, Janet and you, and I am afraid somehow that I did more harm than good; I don't know why, but I am afraid it is so.'
- 'Yes, it is so,' Charlton said without raising his eyes.
- 'But why—tell me why? Why was it harm more than good? I meant nothing but kindness.'
- 'There are people,' Charlton said desperately, 'on whom some kindness is thrown away—and I'm one of them. You meant it well, Mrs. Vanthorpe; but the more kind and friendly you were to me, the more miserable was the contrast of my own beggarly and pitiful sort of life. Why shouldn't I have been a gentleman? Why shouldn't I have a woman of education for my wife? Why should I live in a garret, and have paupers for my companions, and a woman without half an idea for my wife? I used to think once I was

meant for better things—I was a fool, of course; but every time you came near the place, I only thought of it more and more. Why couldn't I have been a man like him—and why couldn't I have had a wife like you? Look at it yourself—I don't care now what I say—do you think it likely a man like me could help seeing the contrast between Janet and you?'

He talked on in such a quick, excited way, that Gabrielle did not at first get time to follow his meaning. When she began to understand it, there was something sickening in this pitiful display of vanity and egotism.

'If I were a man,' she said, 'I should be ashamed of such feelings. I don't care what my class might be, or my way of life, I would not have allowed that any other human creature was better than I for that reason, and that I ought to grovel before him——'

'I didn't grovel----'

'What is that but grovelling? You envy some one because he has a house and you have only a couple of rooms—what is that but grovelling? For shame, Mr. Charlton! Go and pluck up some spirit, and don't

be ashamed of your wife because she doesn't dress in silk and drive in a carriage——'

'No, it wasn't that; a man wants education; a man wants companionship of mind.'

'Stuff!' the impetuous Gabrielle exclaimed; 'I lose patience with such folly and vanity. It is miserable vanity, Mr. Charlton. Why didn't you, with all your ideas, and your genius, and the rest of it, teach your wife to be a companion? She would only have been too glad to learn. You might have moulded her like wax; and if you want adoration, she would have given it to you as—as—as nobody else would. You would have been Shakespeare, and Newton, and anything else you like for her. Well, we have said enough about this. I don't want to speak angrily to you, Mr. Charlton; but I am not surprised at Janet any more.'

'You look down on me with contempt now,' he said, 'and I deserve it all. I despise myself; but if you only knew how much worse I deserve of you than you think——'

'I don't think I want to hear any more, Mr.

Charlton. I am not a confessor.' She had really lost patience with him.

'But it greatly concerns you and Mr. Fielding.'

Gabrielle was about to decline any further revelations, but when he spoke of Fielding she thought herself bound to listen. She sat down patiently and allowed him to go on, affecting a composure she did not feel. He told her in words now disjointed and stammering, now inflated into a kind of egotistical rhetoric, the whole story of his acquaintance with Paulina, of his share in Paulina's plot, and of the manner in which he had at length convinced himself that it was all a fabrication. His was not a nature that could be candid even in a moment of remorse and In the confessional itself he would self-abasement. have kept something back. He did not allow Gabrielle to suppose that he had never really believed in Paulina's story. He exhibited himself as one who feels ashamed of having been deceived by an unworthy fabrication, but who, the moment he finds out its falsehood, is resolute to expose it.

'This is extraordinary,' Gabrielle said when he had come to an end. 'I can't understand it; I can't

understand the motive or meaning of anyone concerned in it. This wretched woman must be mad why should she have such a hatred of Mr. Fielding?'

'She made love to him and he wouldn't have her,' Charlton said bluntly.

'And you, Mr. Charlton, why did you take any part in this wretched affair? What wrong had he done to you?'

'He had done me the wrong of being happy, and free, and well-off, and a gentleman with friends and loved by—loved by people; and with a man of my stamp that was wrong enough.'

'Yes,' said Gabrielle; 'and I? what wrong had I done? I always tried to do you good.'

'I told you before; you made my wretched miserable life more miserable because you showed me what sort of life other people have. You were beautiful, and a lady, and clever, and charming, and if I could have had an ideal woman she would have been—like you. I could not stand Janet after I had seen you. There, I have said it all now. Think anything you like of me; I don't care what anyone thinks of me now.'

Gabrielle rose very quietly.

- 'Mr. Charlton,' she said, 'I had some thought up to this moment of trying to bring Janet and you together again. I have no such thought now. As her sincere friend, I should never advise her to return to your home any more. Anything would be better than that. You are not worthy of the love of any good and faithful woman. You could not be a fit husband for a wife like Janet. The first woman who came in your way with finer clothes or a little more bookreading than your wife would carry your thoughts away from Janet. No; if Janet asks for my advice, I will give it to her—live alone for ever rather than submit to a companionship like that. Neither God nor man dooms a woman to that.'
- 'Still, she is my wife by law,' he said, making feeble protest. 'I could compel her to come back to my home.'
- 'I don't know much about law,' Gabrielle said;
 'I dare say you could. You couldn't compel her to
 respect you and to love you, as she always did before.'
- 'You said yourself that nothing but death ought to part man and wife.'

- 'I had not then heard what you told me of yourself,' Gabrielle answered. 'I was thinking of some common quarrel or anger; I was not thinking of such utter unworthiness.'
 - 'You are very hard upon me. You have no pity.'
- 'No,' Gabrielle declared emphatically; 'I have no pity for such things as that.'

He was inclined to make some abject appeal to her on the ground that she of all women ought to have some pity for his weakness, but her expression of face cowed him. He did not venture to make the attempt.

- 'I might perhaps,' he pleaded, 'be able to do you some service, you and Mr. Fielding; I could help you to show up that woman's plot.'
- 'Mr. Fielding and I are utterly indifferent to that woman's plot, or any other plot,' Gabrielle said. 'We are going to be married at once, to show our contempt for it. She will bring harm on herself; she can't injure us.'
 - 'She is a dangerous woman----'
- 'Dangerous for those who consort with her,' Gabrielle said with emphasis. 'Not for those who

defy her. You can tell her so, Mr. Charlton, if you will.'

Perhaps there was some barb of feminine malice in these words. Gabrielle could not keep them back, so much did she now, despise him; so indifferent had she grown to his feelings. He was keenly pierced by the words; they showed him how he had fallen.

'Oh, you have no mercy,' he said, with a despairing gesture; 'you are like all the rest. You have no pity, and yet you were the cause of all this to me. You didn't mean it, I know; you meant it well; but you were the cause of it all, Mrs. Vanthorpe; you were the cause of it all. I might have been happy if you hadn't tried to be kind to Janet and me.'

He was turning to leave the room. There was something of desperation in his looks which made Gabrielle for the first time afraid. A rush of pity came on her, too, with the fear. She had never seen any human creature so abject before. It seemed to be brought home to her conscience that she had no right to be so hard on his weakness and wrong-doing. What if her mistaken efforts to be kind had really done this wretched creature harm? What if his lost

life and ruined nature were to be laid to her account in a higher world?

The thought made her feel humbled and almost penitent. There is a kindness which kills the character of its recipient, provided the recipient has any character left to be killed; the kindness of indiscriminate almsgiving which curses him who gives and him who takes. Perhaps there is a kindness of another sort as baneful when it too is indiscriminate; especially when it is offered to man by woman. It began to dawn upon Gabrielle that perhaps she would have done much better if she had not arrogated to herself the part of a little providence to Charlton and his wife. Perhaps it would have been better if her kindness had been a little more modestly distrustful of its own right to She began to feel this painfully. thought for a moment entered her mind that the very despair of Charlton was what some women in her place would have considered a tribute to their own attractiveness. What she most despised Charlton for was the appeal that would have suggested such an But it began to be clear to her that there may be a dangerous levity of kindness as well as of coquetry.

She was softened in a moment by the thought. She stopped Charlton as he was going.

'One moment,' she said; 'pray stay. Have I really done you this wrong—this harm, at least, for I meant no wrong? I should be so sorry for that. I only meant to do you some little good if I could. I liked your wife so much—and you for her sake.'

'It does not matter now,' he said grimly; and he was going.

'Oh yes, it does matter,' Gabrielle pleaded earnestly—she was now the one to plead—'If I have been the cause of any harm to you, it is only right that I should be made to know of it.'

'You did the harm,' he said; 'that is certain. You didn't think of it—and I'll tell you why you didn't: because you thought an unfortunate devil like me could have no feeling towards a woman like you, and wouldn't presume to contrast you with any poor ignorant creature of his own class who might be tied to him. I wish I had never seen you—although I know that you haven't a thought to me or to anyone that isn't good and kind—yes, I wish I had never seen you! I might have been content for ever with my

poor little Janet, and never fancied that I should have been happier with a woman of education who could talk to me. I wonder who will talk to me now?'

'Mr. Charlton,' Gabrielle said with quiet earnestness, 'I am more deeply grieved than I could say to
hear that my unfortunate interference has been the
cause of any pain; but I will try to make amends.
It is not too late. You spoke of Janet just now in a
manner that makes me hope you are sensible of the
cruel injustice you have done to her. I welcome your
words. I take back all that I said before; I think
Janet and you ought to be brought together once
again. Let me be the peace-maker and atone in that
way for any harm I may have done.'

He shook his head. 'Too late,' he said again.

'No; not too late. Nothing is too late while we live. Perhaps Janet is now in this very house. Stay here for a moment—I will go and look for her; and you shall meet face to face, and speak to each other.'

She was leaving the room in haste. Charlton interposed.

'To-morrow,' he stammered; 'let it be to-morrow; not to-day, please. I would rather not to-day.'

- 'To-morrow,' Gabrielle said with a faint blush, 'I am to be married; and I am then leaving England.'
- 'So soon?' Charlton said. Then he asked abruptly:
 'Where are you going to be married, and when?'

A moment's doubt crossed Gabrielle's mind. Could he possibly be asking such a question in the interest of the irrepressible Paulina, and with some purpose of enabling her to make some disturbance? But she dismissed the thought at once, and quietly told Charlton the place and the hour.

'Why should not you and Janet be present?' she said, a sudden hope coming up in her mind. 'It would seem like a blessing on my marriage, Mr. Charlton, if I could see Janet and you there together and reconciled. Do let me have this happiness. If I have done you any harm, be generous and do this much good for me in return. Stay here; I will look for Janet.'

She made a half-imperious gesture to him, to tell him that he was to wait, and she ran out of the room. She did not find Janet: Mrs. Bramble had sent the poor little woman out for a walk with one of the maids. Mrs. Bramble had now got to expect a regular visitation

from Fielding every evening, and with a superfluous prudence, having known of Robert's absurd jealousy, she resolved for the future to have Janet out of the house when Miss Gabrielle's lover was likely to present himself. 'One can't be too careful about these things,' the good woman thought. 'We must not leave anything in the power of that bad man to say.' The bad man, it is perhaps well to observe, was not Clarkson Fielding but Robert Charlton. Gabrielle's return to Charlton was a little delayed, for in her way she came upon Fielding himself, and was caught unceremoniously Not having had the faintest thought of in his arms. meeting her there, he felt the wilder delight. explained to him in the hastiest manner what she was trying to do; and then broke away, released on parole with a positive promise to return.

She felt disappointed as she made her way back to the room where she had left Charlton. It was unfortunate that she should have failed to find Janet at once. It was a great chance lost. If she could have brought the husband and wife together at that moment, she might have joined their hearts before the sun had wholly gone down. So she was thinking as she entered the

But then she sadly changed her mind. Charlton had gone. He had managed to get out of the house unseen by anyone. It was plain that he had escaped in order that he might not meet Janet. Gabrielle was disheartened and almost dismayed. seemed to her that the misunderstanding between Janet and her husband must have deeper roots than she had supposed. Like a woman, she was more concerned about the estrangement between the husband and the wife than about the treacherous part which Charlton acknowledged that he had played in regard to Paulina's story. She thought that a very bad thing for him to have done; but she was not impressed by it as a man would have been. Most men would have regarded the breach of manly honour and truth as a graver offence than any quarrel with one's wife. Gabrielle went back to her lover and told him of her trouble. But it must be owned that they soon ceased to talk of Charlton, and began to talk only of themselves. To-morrow they hoped to be free to meet when and where they pleased; to-morrow they hoped to leave England together.

While they sat in the gloaming, Robert Charlton

sought out Paulina. He found her in her lodgings alone and a good deal dispirited. She yawned and was melancholy; 'in the blues,' she put it.

'Oh, dear me, Charlton, I'm glad you have come in,' she said, 'although you know very well you ain't a lively companion. But you're better than nothing. Ain't it a dull evening? I don't know what to do with myself—really, I don't.'

'Why do you sit at home in this dull way?' he asked. 'Why don't you go out somewhere? Why don't you amuse yourself?' There was an unusual animation about his manner.

'Well, I don't know where to go exactly. I should like to go to some rattling good music-hall, or to some place where one could see dancing. I should like to go to Cremorne. Is Cremorne running yet? We say "running" in America, Charlton, for going on, you know.'

'Why don't you go to Cremorne?'

'Because, you see, while all this business is going on, I am forced to be very prudent and proper and all that sort of thing. It would never do if I were to be seen showing myself off at some dancing-place. One 'After all,' Charlton said meditatively, 'I don't know that it wouldn't be better for you to let them get married. You could prosecute him then for bigamy.'

'Don't bother me about your bigamies. That ain't my game. I want to keep them unmarried. I don't care about your prosecutions. I tell you they shan't marry. And now don't annoy me any more with your talk of that kind, there's a good fellow, or I may lose my temper.'

She sat down again.

'Well,' Charlton said, 'I only called in to-night to say that I am promised some news to-morrow. Something is going to be resolved on, I am told. I believe it is pretty certain that he and Major Leven are going out to New Orleans together.'

'Oh, capital!' Paulina exclaimed, clapping her hands; 'just the thing I am glad to hear. There's the marriage broke off for goodness knows how long. The voyage out and the hunting up of proofs and evidences and things, and all the delays, and then the coming back—Lord! it will take six months at the very

least; and who can tell what may happen between this and then?'

- 'Just so,' Charlton assented; 'who can say what may happen between this and then? Between this and then? Who can say what may happen to-morrow?'
- 'This is good news you bring me, Charlton, if it only turns out to be true.'
- 'I believe it is true; I am told positively that they are going out together to New Orleans. Anyhow, I shall know for certain to-morrow. I shall come and let you know at once.'
- 'That's a dear good fellow; I shall be wild with anxiety. When shall I expect you?'
- 'Let me see.' He stopped and considered. 'Twelve o'clock I shall probably be able to leave that place,' he did not say what place, 'and I shall come straight to you. Oh, well, let us say one o'clock. I shall have the news for you at one o'clock to-morrow.'
- 'All right. I'll stay in bed until late. I shall only get up in time to see you at one o'clock. I think when one is expecting anything, one doesn't mind the anxiety of waiting so much when one is in bed.'

'At one o'clock, then,' he said, 'I'll bring you the news. At one o'clock, mind. We shall know for certain then.'

There was something odd about his manner. 'I can't quite make out that chap,' Paulina said, when he had gone. 'Anyhow, I shall be glad to see him at one o'clock to-morrow.'

CHAPTER XII.

THE FAIR PENITENT.

The day for which Paulina was looking out, the 'tomorrow' of her last evening's conversation, came with
wonderful softness and brightness. So clear was the
sky, that one might see at the far end of long London
thoroughfares the faint outlines of gentle hills and
uplands of which he had not before suspected the
existence. If he happened to be looking south from
any point of tolerable elevation, he was sometimes
amazed to see the Crystal Palace standing out on the
shoulder of its hill as clearly as if it were just under his
eyes. The sunlight had something magical in its soft
intensity. It was so gentle one might look it straight
in the face, and so bright that it lit up lanes and
crannies that always before seemed too darksome to
admit any genial influence. Just the very morning,

one might have said, for a young bride. No auspices could be more gracious for a wedding. No doubt the experienced would see something ominous of sudden change in the almost unearthly brightness and the strange stillness. Once there came in Weimar an hour of indescribable quiet; the very clouds stood still; the air was breathless in its soft delight: and Goethe knew that an earthquake was impending over some part of the world. Experienced persons who looked up at the skies this day said that a sudden change was coming. But it will not matter to the young bride if only the change keeps off until the sun goes down. The happy omen is complete then. The future of the young wife is supposed to be assured if only the day be genial up to the time of the sun's sinking. Then, come foul weather or fair, it is all the same so far as augury for her is concerned.

Some such thought may have been passing through the mind of Clarkson Fielding on this particular morning as he looked up at the sky. He understood enough of the evidences of the atmosphere and the season to know that a change was coming; but he was glad to think that it was some hours off; and he wished

the sun to shine and give good omen for yet a while. As for Gabrielle, she knew nothing and thought nothing of weather symptoms: she only knew that she was full of happiness, although nervous and tremulous enough withal; and the sun would have shone for her if it were the midst of an arctic winter. It must be owned that Clarkson Fielding was nervous and restless too that morning. When Wilberforce called for him, Clarkson was glad to be compelled to talk. It took him out of himself and his own emotions for the moment. There are occasions when even a Briton must be nervous. Wilberforce ventured on some mild pleasantry concerning his brother's evident condition. 'I didn't think you knew there were such things as nerves,' he said. Clarkson answered good-humouredly and very truly that he had found out in himself a good many emotions lately of which he had not known anything before. Then they went out together.

Paulina was waiting in much anxiety and impatience the coming of her confederate. She had adopted the plan which she told him of in order to render her anxiety bearable, and remained in bed until a very advanced hour of the morning. Paulina was a person

of that not uncommon class to whom the most delightful thing after great exertion is the full indulgence of She was as indolent as she was energetic. laziness. When she had nothing better to do she could lie in bed with all the satisfaction that Vendôme himself might have felt. That great soldier, as we are told, never got out of bed except when he could not help it; as, for example, when he had to put in an appearance at court, or to fight the English in the field. Even in his campaigns he lay in bed until it was absolutely necessary that he should get up and take command. Then he jumped up, put on a tremendous spurt of energy, showed that he had all the genius of a true commander; sometimes, let us acknowledge, giving the English general a good deal more than that officer liked; and then Vendôme went to bed again. Paulina was a sort of feminine Vendôme in alternation of action and repose and equal relish of each in its turn. She was, as a rule, very fond of having her breakfast in bed, and indeed seldom consumed that meal except while lolling there. This one particular morning, however, she was lazy on principle. Mr. Shandy finds that all mental trouble is best endured by mortals in a recumbent posture;

Paulina's philosophy had taught her that this is especially true of anxiety. So she lay in bed until it approached the hour at which Charlton might be expected; and then she got up and dressed.

Her anxiety had more than one cause. She had been a good deal impressed by Charlton's peculiar manner the evening before; and the longer she thought over it, the more she became convinced that it was in some way ominous. While he was with her she was too eager about the news he brought to pay much attention to his odd manner or to her own suspicions; but after he had gone the impression deepened and deepened. thing is up with that chap,' she kept repeating to herself; and she at once thought of treachery. Had he gone over to the other side? Was he up to any dodge of that sort? Was he playing into Fielding's hands, and letting the other side see every card that she and he were preparing to use? When he came at one o'clock, might it perhaps be in the company of the minions of the law about to escort her to prison? Paulina had said very truly to Charlton that she would not care much about punishment if only she got her revenge. But suppose she only got the punishment,

and her enemies had the revenge? Suppose she were dragged off to prison, and while she was there Fielding and Gabrielle got married?

The idea was insufferable. Paulina walked up and down the room restless as a hyena in a cage. She had at one moment a thought of going out to find Charlton, so dreadful did the delay and the suspense begin to seem. But the time was nearly up, and it would be merely absurd to run the risk of losing him altogether by vaguely hunting for him she knew not where. So she kept indoors and waited; if that can be called waitingthat sort of performance which the hyena keeps up in her cage. The last five minutes seemed of neverending length. Paulina hardly took her eyes from the little clock on the chimney-piece; until at last she put her hand over her eyes and said she would not look up again until she heard it strike one. So she walked up and down, seeing nothing but the strip of floor just beneath her feet. At last the little clock piped out the one stroke. 'He isn't coming at all!' Paulina said to herself at once almost before the stroke had ceased to echo. In another moment, however, she heard his foot upon the stairs.

seemed to come with deliberate and torturing slowness.

The door opened. Charlton came in. He had a strange expression on his face, partly as of triumph, partly as of amusement. The moment Paulina saw him she felt sure he had gone over to the other side. She met him with a fierce abruptness.

- 'Come, man, your news!' she said. 'Have you any news?'
 - 'Oh yes,' Charlton said slowly; 'I have news.'
 - 'Is it good or bad? Out with it!'
- 'Good or bad for whom?' he asked with provoking deliberateness. 'For you, or for them?'
 - 'For me, of course. Is it good for me?'
- 'Capital news for you,' he said; 'if your story is true, and you really want to have revenge on him.'
 - 'All right—that I do. Come, let's have it.'
- 'Well, you have him in your power now—that's all; under your very feet. You can send him to penal servitude at once.'
 - 'Why? What has he been doing?'
- 'Committing bigamy, I suppose,' Charlton quietly said, 'if your story is true; and it is true, is it not?'

- 'What has he been doing?' she said again fiercely, and going up so close to Charlton that he involuntarily drew back.
- 'He has just been married,' Charlton answered, 'to Gabrielle Vanthorpe; to her that was Gabrielle Vanthorpe, I mean.'
- 'It's a lie,' Paulina screamed. 'He daren't do it; she wouldn't do it. Don't you believe it, Charlton; it's a lie.'
 - Seeing is believing. I saw them married.'
 - 'You saw them married?'
- 'I saw them married; I saw them with my own eyes; I was in the church. Oh, it was quite a tip-top affair; you ought to have been there. I dare say you would have been if you had only known in time.' He sneered undisguisedly at her now.
- 'Look here,' she said; 'if you don't want me to do something dreadful to you, or to somebody, just tell me plain and straight where you were to-day and what you saw.'
- 'It's easily told. I was at the church'—he named it—'this morning, and I saw Gabrielle Vanthorpe that was, married to Clarkson Fielding that is. I saw the

whole ceremony; they are married as fast and firm as church and parson can make them. Sir Wilberforce Fielding was there; and Lady Honeybell and Major Leven; and you should have seen old Lefussis in a suit of new clothes and such a flower in his button-hole! The bride looked beautiful, everyone said. She stopped to speak to me as she was leaving the church leaning on her husband's arm; I didn't want to be seen, but she stopped and saw me and spoke to me. She is as good a woman as there is under heaven: she was able to think even at that moment about saving a wretch like me. She was, indeed. Saving me!' He laughed.

Paulina did not pay much heed to this part of the story. She was thinking of other things.

- 'Where have they gone?' she asked, making a movement as though she were about to rush out wildly in pursuit of them
- 'They have gone off by train to Sir Wilberforce's house somewhere far down in the country; a hundred miles off, I am told. They are actually gone; I thought it would not be worth while coming to you until I could give you the news all complete.'
 - 'When did you know of this?

- 'About the train? oh, well, I asked someone in the church, and then I went to the railway station and saw that they did actually go off—so that I might bring you all the news.'
- 'I don't mean about the train,' she said; 'I mean, when did you hear that they were going to be married to-day?'
- 'I heard it last evening; on the best authority, as people say.'
 - 'Before you came here to me?'
- 'Yes; oh yes; certainly. As it happened, just before I came here to you.'
 - 'And you kept this a secret from me?'
- 'Why, yes. I thought it best. You might be going to the church, perhaps, and making a disturbance, and bringing yourself into trouble. Besides, don't you see, if he is your husband, you have him completely at your mercy now, seeing that he has actually married this woman. I wouldn't spare him if I was you. He does not deserve it, if your story is true; and of course it is true, is it not?'

He spoke in such a tone as to make it perfectly plain that he knew her story to be false. 'You wretch!' she exclaimed. 'You coward!' and she heaped other opprobrious names upon him. 'You have been deceiving me all this time. You were pretending to be my friend, and you were my enemy. You were a spy for them—that's what you were.'

'Not at all,' he answered composedly. 'You will find, perhaps, that I have been your best friend. saved you from putting yourself in the way of being sent to the treadmill. If you had put yourself in their power one bit, they would have come down on you, don't you see? Besides, you know, what would be the good of it? You see, they didn't care twopence for anything you said; they didn't believe your story for half a minute. were sharper than I; I was taken in for a while. course they knew all about it, and I didn't. But I found you out lately. You've made a bad business of it, Mrs. Vanthorpe; and you ought to be greatly obliged to me for preventing you from making it still worse. don't know yet what Sir Wilberforce may be inclined to do; and I think, if I were you, I wouldn't be found here any longer.'

'You were in the business as well as I,' she screamed, turning on him a face white with passion. 'You coward and sneak! You helped me; you set me on; you put things into my head; you knew as well as I did that the whole thing was only a dodge to prevent him from getting married to her; and you went into the plot with all your heart. If I suffer you shall suffer too.'

- 'No,' Charlton said, with a grim distortion of the lips which was too painful to be called a smile; 'I am safe enough. They can't touch me.'
- 'You coward!' she exclaimed. 'I suppose you have given king's evidence, or whatever they call it. You are safe? Oh, it is like you! Lord, what a fool I was! I might have seen it in your face. A coward like that couldn't even be true to his pal.'
- 'I haven't given any evidence to anyone,' he said. 'I didn't mean that I was safe in that way. If you like to go and give king's evidence, as you call it, and try to get off, I think it wouldn't be half a bad thing. You may say, if you like, that I was a party to the whole plot. So I was; I don't deny it; I shan't find any fault with you if you go before any magistrate and tell the story from first to last.'

Charlton expected with almost every word he spoke that she would actually make a furious assault upon him, and, what with her strength and her desperation and his physical weakness, he did not believe his life would be safe in her hands. But somehow the crisis was too great for any mere burst of personal fury to satisfy Paulina. Her passion was not equal to any adequate expression of her wrongs, her complete discomfiture, her betrayal, her utter failure. She threw her arms once wildly about almost as one does who suddenly falls into deep water; and then she sat in a chair, and leant her elbows on the table, and covered her face with her large white hands. Suddenly she looked up and waved one of her hands at him; an imperious gesture as if she were pushing him from her; and she said in a hoarse voice:

'Get away, man! Get right away out of this! I don't want to be seen in this state by a fellow like you. Get away, I tell you, or it will be worse for you! Get away!'

Then she put her head down again and did not look up until she knew that he was gone. He went without saying a word, and he was never seen by her again.

As soon as he had gone she gave full way to one of

those tropical bursts of furious passion in which she seldom indulged except when alone. She knew quite well that the indulgence was necessary to her getting any such self-control again as would enable her to think over her situation with any tolerable degree of cool judgment. At last the tempest racked itself out, and she found, when she came to think things over, that her one predominant desire was for revenge upon Robert Charlton. She could forgive everybody now but him. She even began to persuade herself that she owed something, after all, to that good sweet Gabrielle, and to be sorry that she had ever done a thing to harm the kind dear creature. She wrought herself at length into a mood of very sweet penitence, and out of sheer goodness convinced herself that she was bound to minister to her own revenge. She dressed herself anew and with much care. She had had a light silk dress on; she now arrayed herself in solemn black velvet with white lace collar and hardly any ornaments—a kind of 'Mourning Bride' or 'Fair Penitent' sort of garb. Paulina remembered having seen in her early days some stately tragedy queen arrayed in such a style when she appeared in some scene which was intended

to illustrate the dignity of complete repentance and self-surrender. She put on a heavy black veil which was to shroud her face until the moment should come for lifting it and allowing someone to see that the self-denounced offender was not altogether without charm. Paulina had been in the days of her youth a barmaid in the immediate neighbourhood of Bow Street, and, like most young women thus circumstanced, she had a familiar knowledge of the ways and the business hours of the London police courts. She knew that her present residence was actually within the jurisdiction of Bow Street. So when all her make-up was satisfactorily concluded she sent for a cab—a heavy four-wheeler, because, though she hated that kind of conveyance, yet she felt that the sprightly hansom was quite unsuited to the business of repentance and selfdenunciation. She drove to Bow Street, had an interview with the sitting magistrate, accused herself of being a party to a conspiracy, told him the full details, and gave the name of the Surrey-side lodging-house keeper and that of Robert Charlton as her accomplices and fellow-conspirators. The story at first seemed incredible and absurd, and Paulina's manner filled the

magistrate with the conviction that he had to do with a lunatic. Her tragic air was something tremendous. She demanded to be conducted forthwith to a dungeon; only stipulating that her accomplice and betrayer, as she called Robert Charlton, should be conducted, for his part, to a similar lodging.

. 'Worthy magistrate,' the fair penitent exclaimed, 'look on me! I am not mad. Do not think it. I am a child of misfortune, and I have fallen into the hands of plotters, and I have been induced to join in a wicked plot against one who was all kindness to me. Scorn me; I deserve it all; but do not refuse to believe my story. Hasten and let the innocent be saved before it is too late. I am not mad; no, by Heaven, I am not mad!'

She sank into a chair and felt that this was a scene worthy of a heroine. The magistrate sent for Sir Wilberforce Fielding and Major Leven, and, having talked with them, came to the conclusion that Paulina was not mad and that there was something in her story.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE MINDED LIKE THE WEATHER, MOST UNQUIETLY.'

Evening was setting in as Robert Charlton returned to Bolingbroke Place. A change had come over the day; there was something strange and ominous in the atmosphere and in the sky. Heavy yellow clouds showing as if charged with thunder were coming together slowly and settling along the horizon. An uncanny light gleamed from beneath their edges. The air was thick; there seemed a kind of yellow fog abroad; only it was not like the familiar visitation of our November days, any more than it resembled the golden haze of the Campagna or Thrasymene. A storm of some sort appeared about to burst in thunder and rain, and yet it did not come. It exhaled, one might have thought, in the curious yellow haze, and was dissipated unwholesomely abroad. People passing along the streets sometimes stopped and looked

up amazed at the unusual appearance of the sky and the It must be something very unusual that can clouds. attract the ordinary Londoner to look up at the sky. A cab-horse down, or a man having his boots blacked, or a woman raising a window, will attract him fast enough, and indeed will hold him from the pursuit of his journey as Punch and Judy hold an errand-boy. But there must be something wonderful going on in the sky before it will strike him as calling for observation. This evening, people did stop to look up at the sky, and they then usually looked down hastily at the pavement, expecting to see it flecked with great raindrops; and forthwith glanced up at the sky again as if seeking there for explanation of something that puzzled them. Some hurried on as if to escape from the expected downpour: and then after a moment or two, seeing that no downpour appeared to be coming, they slackened their pace and looked as if they had not expected anything in particular. As Robert Charlton turned down Bolingbroke Place its aspect was very peculiar, for its narrowness allowed it to be completely canopied by one of the thick yellow clouds. Charlton walked up to the door under this strange unwholesome ill-omened roof of

cloud. He looked up once or twice, and hastily looked down again as if he did not like the sight.

He opened the door with his latch-key and went in. Before the door of what were Fielding's rooms he stopped for a moment and listened. All was silence. He tried the door. It was unlocked as usual. opened it and looked in. The rooms were evidently unoccupied still. If Lefussis meant to have them, he had not made any way in their occupation yet. All the things that Fielding owned were gone, and the rooms were reduced to their ordinary London-lodging condition. Charlton stood for a moment thinking how badly things had gone with him since first he used to enter those rooms; how happily all had turned out for Fielding, and how miserably for him. He saw everything now in cold clear light; he had no more illusions about himself or anyone else. He now saw Fielding only as kind, generous, and manly; his own ignoble jealousies about Janet appeared to him exactly what they might have appeared to any impartial observer. He saw that every evil that had come on him had come by his own fault, by his own direct action and invocation. He had persistently turned kindness into unkindness and in-

terpreted good as evil. He had allowed himself to be possessed of devils. He had invited them, and they came at last. Yet he did not feel exactly repentant. He had only a dull pervading sensation that everything had gone wrong, and that he was the cause of it all; that he had himself to blame. But he had not the moral energy to blame himself in the healthy way of one who is resolved that if he has done harm he will try to atone for it, and that if he has fallen he will try to get up again. He had, indeed, a vague sense of satisfaction in having completely thwarted Paulina, and thus done some service, however small, to Gabrielle; and there was just enough of a better soul left in him to make him feel a certain satisfaction in the thought that Gabrielle would never know it was he who had done this much good. He was proud, that is to say, that his attempt to do her a service was wholly unrecognised and unrewarded. But he had no true repentant purpose. He had no thought of the one only way by which he could have made his repentance of some account to others—of trying to redeem his life and retrieve himself, and win back the affection and confidence of his wife and make her happy. His nature had not the

moral fibre for this. It was too limp and nerveless. All he felt was that he was good for nothing any more.

So he closed the door of the room again, and he dragged heavily up the stairs. Through each window, as he mounted, the vellow atmosphere showed itself with what seemed to him a baleful glare. As he rose somewhat high he came to a landing with a window from which he could just see the tops of two trees far away somewhere; he could see them against the sky, and nothing else. His mind went back to a time when he lived with his father and mother in a small London room, very high up, from the window of which he could just see the tips of two trees that seemed to him then to be growing in the land of romance and of youth, and of the strange sweet adventures which fanciful boyhood expects vaguely for coming manhood's days. He used to think wonderingly of what was on the other side of those trees, and how they could be reached, and whether he should reach them, and what exquisite experiences of love and struggle and strictly romantic heroic suffering and final success he should have when he got there. The odd idea struck him that perhaps these were the same two trees now seen from another point of view. 'I have got to the other side now indeed,' Charlton thought as he turned away; 'and this is what I have come to. This is the other side. This is the end.'

He went into his room and sat down and fell into a kind of half-torpid reverie. After a while—he did not know how long it was—he was startled by a knock at the door. The idea of his having further communication with the outer world seemed unnatural to him. He got up slowly and let in Mr. Lefussis.

The face of Lefussis was beaming with joy.

- 'I saw you at the church to-day, Charlton,' he said.
 'I didn't see your wife, by the way. She isn't unwell,
 I hope?'
 - 'No,' Charlton answered; 'she isn't unwell.'
 - Was she there?
- 'She is staying with her aunt; her aunt is Mrs. Bramble—a servant at the house of the lady who was married to-day; a housekeeper; that's the same as a servant, isn't it? I dare say my wife has told you of it often enough. She is not very good at keeping secrets.' The coming of Lefussis seemed to have sent Charlton back into all the old ignoble realisms, the petulances and jealousies, and the rest.

'If it was a secret,' the chivalric Lefussis declared, 'I am convinced Mrs. Charlton could be relied upon to keep it locked in her breast against the tortures of all the tyrants in the world. But I honour her for not thinking it necessary to make any secret of the highly respectable and responsible position occupied by her aunt in the household of a most charming and a most distinguished lady. At the same time, Charlton, I think it right to observe that your wife never said anything to me on the subject that I can recollect. She doubtless did not think it necessary.'

'Very well,' Charlton said listlessly.

'Was it not a touching sight to-day?' Lefussis 'How charming she looked! how sweet went on. and modest! And what a noble fellow he is! They have the good wishes of all who know them. I say, Charlton, my good friend, without seeming to soar too much into the rhetorical, that the good wishes of all who know them follow them into their new life as the plaudits of the delighted audience follow into his retirement for the night the great actor who has given them so much pleasure?'

'That would not have been bad for a speech at a

wedding breakfast,' Charlton grimly observed. 'Was it prepared with any such view?'

'The same cynic as ever!' Lefussis said with eyes of beaming good nature. 'Still the same! Even the nuptials of the beautiful and the brave don't win him for a moment away into more genial words! But I don't mind, Charlton; I know it is only words with you, this little cynicism; I know what a substratum of kindly feeling is beneath all that rugged surface. Yes, yes; the man who has the adoration of that dear little wife of yours must have some right to it. Well, well, I was glad to see you there to-day; though I hadn't any opportunity of getting near you. If I had been near you, I would have asked if you had ever heard anything more of that odd vulgar woman who made these absurd charges against our friend Clarkson Fielding? Has she absconded?'

- 'I know nothing about her, now.'
- 'No, no, of course you wouldn't know anything about her yourself; but I thought you might have heard, perhaps. It is an odd thing that from the first moment I saw that woman I set her down as a liar of the first magnitude. I hope Fielding will have the firmness to

I told him so more than once. It isn't any personal affair of his; if it were, I should be for mercy as well as anyone; but it is a public duty; it is for the public safety. Think how that woman got taken up as a sort of leader of a movement here; and think of the harm that may be brought on any good and great cause by such a creature. No, no; the utmost rigour of the law ought to be administered to her—to her and her accomplices, whoever they may be. You agree with me, Charlton, my good friend?'

'If I were an accomplice of hers,' Charlton said,
'I should take care to get outside the reach of justice.'

'Quite so; yes; you think the case so clear against her? You are right, Charlton; quite right. Well, to pass to other topics. Do you observe, Charlton, that I am somewhat in good spirits to-day, more than usual?'

'You do seem to me to be very happy,' Charlton said, looking at him curiously. 'You seem out of place in this dismal old room.'

'Dismal? Oh, come, dismal!—"stone walls do not a prison make," you know. When Mrs. Charlton is here,

her presence gilds these—ah, ah—spaces, let us say. But I am somewhat radiant. First, I am delighted at the auspicious marriage of our two dear friends; and in the next instance I have some good news of my own.'

Charlton, with one hand screening his eyes, looked up at him with a certain melancholy curiosity. gaunt figure of Lefussis had in it ordinarily something that roused in Robert Charlton a sense of the ridiculous. He always looked with great contempt upon Lefussis, and did not give to his accounts of interviews with high officials any credit for even that basis of truth which they really possessed, and which the uncontrolled imagination of poor Lefussis piled up with the very palaces and Taj-Mahals of political responsibility. It is not difficult for a pushing self-conceited person in London, who is always busy in the political crowd, to get to an occasional interview with some great official; and when Lefussis was admitted to speech of a secretary of state, he took the civil commonplaces of bored officialism for private and confidential communications. Charlton did not believe in his good news now. His melancholy curiosity was only for the poor creature who allowed himself to be gulled with vain imaginings.

- 'Yes,' Lefussis said; 'congratulate me, Charlton; I have got an appointment. At last; at last.'
- 'Indeed? That is, you have been promised an appointment, don't you mean?'
- 'No, no; more than that. Quite different, my dear friend. I have had private assurance that the place is at my disposal. Just the very thing I should have wished for; hoc erat in votis, Charlton! The place of assistant-deputy administrator of the St. Xavier's Settlements, where my dear friend Victor Heron was administrator once. I had the news to-day in confidence from Sir Wilberforce Fielding himself.'

Charlton now began to be really surprised. This was something like substance.

'Yes, indeed. The fact is, it was he who took the thing in hand; inspired, I need hardly say, by my dear friends Clarkson and Gabrielle Fielding. He has ever so many powerful friends, and he doesn't do anything in politics himself, and never asks a favour; so of course, when he said a word for an old colonial servant like myself, who was unjustly treated by a former government, the thing was done. Yes; I am to go out almost immediately. A splendid thing, Charlton;

salary and emoluments come to quite five hundred a year. Five hundred a year, Charlton; think of that. Why, my dear fellow, I am not ashamed to say that for years back I have seldom been in a position to expend much more than fifty pounds a year.'

There was a twinkle of moisture in the eyes of Lefussis. He turned away for a moment. Then he resumed his former position.

'Well, that's the good news, Charlton,' he said; and I was anxious to tell you first thing. I knew I could count on your congratulations. We are old friends; and I may say we have tasted of the cup of adversity together. I say we have tasted of it, because I am well assured that for you there is prosperity in store. You are young; you have energy; you have talents, sir—great artistic talents; and you have friends who will stand by you until you can stand up for yourself. Your course, Charlton, is clear.'

- 'So it is,' Charlton said. 'My course is clear.'
- 'I am delighted to hear you say so.' Lefussis was not a particularly observant person, and he followed Charlton's words without noticing the manner in which they were spoken. 'I knew it, of course, but I am

to be made sure. Thank Heaven, then, we are all in a fair way. And so we are all leaving this old place! It will know us no more, Charlton. Fielding is gone; and I am going; and you will go next. Well, I hope three good fellows will come in our places and be prosperous too in their turn. Good evening, Charlton, my dear friend. You will give my compliments to your wife, won't you?

- 'When I see her,' Charlton said.
- 'I may look in upon you to-morrow morning as I pass,' Lefussis said, 'if I have any further news.'
- 'I am going to be locked in and very busy all tomorrow,' Charlton answered without looking up.
- 'Oh, indeed? very good; to-morrow evening then, perhaps, somewhere about this hour.'
- 'If you knock about this hour to-morrow evening,' said Charlton, 'and I hear you, I'll open the door and shall be glad to see you. I can promise you that much.'
 - 'Oh, I'll make you hear me fast enough.'
 - 'You may have to knock loudly.'
- 'Why so, my dear friend? are you likely to be asleep?' Lefussis asked, turning back as he was about to leave the room, and for the first time looking at Charlton with a certain surprise or curiosity.

- 'I may be asleep,' Charlton said; 'very likely.'
- 'Then why should I disturb you, my dear friend?'
- 'You will not disturb me.'

Lefussis stopped for a moment uncertain; but Charlton had buried his head in his work again, and did not appear inclined to carry on any more conversation. Lefussis was not a very keen observer of men studied the affairs of continents and of nations only. But he was dimly conscious of something odd in the manner of Charlton which impressed him with a certain uncomfortable sensation, and which he was able to recall very vividly afterwards. For the moment, however, he paid no further attention to it. He asked Charlton if he had noticed the strange look of the evening, and he predicted a storm. Then he said good night and went to his own room, to sit there alone and meditate for hours on the bright future which he saw at length expanding before him, and which was to repay him for so many years of hope deferred.

When Lefussis had gone, Charlton sat for some time thinking. Then he got up and began to put things in order as if he were preparing the place for some new tenant. He kept going in and out of the two rooms in-

cessantly, arranging every article of dress or furniture in its proper place. Once it so happened that in his arrangements he brought a cloak which Janet had left behind her out of the bedroom and put it for the time on a chair in the sitting-room. He forgot it there apparently, and it was allowed to rest on the chair while he went on with his self-appointed labour. He had now a lamp lighted in each room; but the lamps were not fully turned on, and the light was dim. Once, as he came out of the bedroom, his eyes fell upon the chair with the cloak on it; and his surprised imagination filled the cloak with the familiar form, and for the moment he actually thought that Janet herself was there. He gave a shrill cry, like that of a restless sleeper, and called 'Janet, Janet!' and then the empty cloak became an empty cloak again, and he took it up and threw it aside with a growl of contempt for his outbreak of imagination. When he had got everything into such order as seemed to him fitting, he went into the bedroom, locked the door, carefully closed the windows, and covered over their crevices with tablecovers and such-like articles; and stuffed the chimney with old garments, and stopped up the keyholes.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NIGHT OF STORM.

THE storm broke at last on London: and broke in So wild a storm had not been felt in the metropolis for many a year. It was more like some tornado in the tropics than an outburst of bad weather in moderate London. It came first with a fierce downpour of rain which swept over the streets like the rush of a great stream bursting its bounds; and there was blue lightning, and a wind that made steeples rock, and seemed as if it meant to uproot the trees in the quiet parks wholly unused to such passionate vehemence. When the rain ceased, the wind only grew still more fierce and furious. It was about ten o'clock when the rain set in, and by eleven the hurricane was blowing. It soon swept the streets well-nigh clear of passengers. Those who had to fare home in despite of it found themselves blown round corners and glad to cling to lamp-posts, even though these supporters shook and creaked and rattled in the blast. The crossing of a bridge was a formidable piece of work even for a stout Here and there a little party would be seen returning southward from one of the theatres, two men and a woman perhaps, and their efforts to get across one of the bridges seemed like the enterprise of Bruce's everlasting spider, so often were they beaten back and so sturdily and good-humouredly did they try the attempt again. The men put the woman between them, and with her clinging to each they boldly breasted the gale. They were driven back, and they were compelled to twirl round, to turn sideways, edgeways, any way to get out of the full force of the wind. Then they made a rush when there was a little lull and got a certain way, and so, no doubt, at last accomplished the passage with much laughter and screaming and rustling of skirts and wild clutching of hats. The boats and barges under the bridges were torn from their moorings and dashed against each other with creaking and groaning that sounded sometimes like the agony of human beings drowning in some darksome pool. There was a high tide, too, to make matters worse, and on the low-lying south side the water flooded many of the houses and drove the inmates into the howling and rain-scourged streets for shelter.

In many houses that were not at all shaky or in danger people sat up half the night watching and shivering and not knowing what to do—afraid to remain indoors and not liking to trust themselves to the wet and windy streets, with, after all, perhaps, no real peril to their roofs to warrant any precipitation. These were, however, only the nervous few. People in general only thought of the storm as having a possible danger for other persons, perhaps even in other towns, or out at sea, but did not think it had any particular application to themselves. Perhaps the only serious danger was for old and unsteady houses that stood alone or at the end of a row or at a corner, and against which, therefore, the wind was free to blow with all its strength. There was not a great deal of harm done. Here and there a house or part of a house fell in, and then there was wild consternation all through that quarter, and report ran that half London was being blown down, and people swarmed into the streets until the moment of alarm

passed away and they one by one crept under cover again. The storm had at least given good warning, and there was time for those to get away who feared that their roofs would not hold up over their heads. There was crash and noise enough everywhere to keep alarm alive and prevent people from being taken unawares.

Slates and bricks and chimney-pots were falling here and there; many an old sign-post which had swung for generations uninjured came clattering to the ground. In dull old out-of-the-way streets there were ancient publichouses with signs bearing names which carried one back a generation or two in the history of popular hero-worship; where the 'Admiral Rodney' or the 'Sidney Smith' or the 'Regent's Arms' emblazoned on a swinging board told of a steady-going business that did not trouble itself about new ways and new heroes. In many such places the old signs came tumbling down, and were never put up again. They might have remained there for ever, only for the storm; but when they actually did come down, the owners suddenly discovered that it was time to make a change and to move with the age. More than one 'Beaconsfield Arms' and

'Cyprus House' dates from that storm and the falls that it brought along with it.

Janet Charlton was one of those whom the storm alarmed, although hardly for herself. She was well housed in Gabrielle's little dwelling, and though the trees were blown about with much crash and disturbance. yet the possibility of anything happening to the house itself, beyond at most the fall of a chimney-pot, could hardly have occurred even to nervous and timorous Janet. But it had been a melancholy day with her. She was sincerely delighted at Gabrielle's happiness: she would have gladdened at anything that gave her and Fielding any joy. Yet the marriage and its surroundings could not but fill poor Janet's heart with thoughts of her own marriage, her own disappointments, her own misery and loneliness, and she shed many a tear as she moped through the deserted They had a specially deserted air just now; for Mrs. Leven had sent at once and dismantled the memorial room, and had every relic of Albert Vanthorpe carried away from the place. All this gave such an appearance to a house as it might have when a dead body is borne out of it in its

The dismantled room had a dismal fascination coffin. for poor Janet, who kept haunting it as sadly as a ghost might have done, and truly to as little purpose as ghosts usually have when frequenting drearily the houses of the living. When the sun faded out of the sky and the yellow ominous clouds began to cover up everything with a sulphurous pall, Janet got to think that the end of the world, or something very like it, must surely be at hand; and when at last the storm burst, it found her with shattered nerves, all terrorstricken anticipation and agony of fear. Mrs. Bramble was an early woman, and was somewhat displeased to see, as she passed Janet's room, that the light was streaming from under the door. She knocked at the door and, without waiting for any answer, opened it and went in, and found Janet fully dressed and looking out of the window with uneasy eyes. This seemed to Mrs. Bramble highly irregular; and she always held to the opinion that when the mistress of a house was absent, things ought to go on with special regularity. Otherwise she thought there would be a sort of defection of duty.

Mrs. Bramble was not able to speak without a

certain sharpness of tone when she saw Janet fully dressed at such an hour.

- 'Goodness gracious, child! whatever are you doing there? Why ain't you in bed asleep? Don't you know it's past eleven?'
- 'I can't sleep, aunt; I don't like to go to bed. Don't you hear the storm how it rages among the trees?'
- 'I hear the wind, sure enough; and it's dreadful; but you and I can't stop it, Janet; and it won't do us any harm. This house won't be blown down, you may be sure of that.'
- 'No; I wasn't thinking of that, aunt; I was thinking---'
 - 'Yes; what were you thinking of?'
- 'I was thinking—of Robert. I wonder if any harm has happened to him?'
- 'Goodness, Janet! not a bit, you may be sure. What harm could happen to him? You don't suppose the wind would blow him away, do you? You may set your mind at rest about him; nothing ever happens to that sort of man.'
 - 'I don't know; I feel uneasy; I can't tell why,

but I am afraid something bad is happening to Robert.

Mrs. Bramble grew impatient.

- 'Janet, you are too absurd. Why are you thinking about that man at all? I dare say he isn't thinking about you.'
- 'I don't know,' poor Janet said; 'perhaps he isn't; I can't help that; I am thinking about him. I am sure we shall hear some bad news of him soon. Why is there such a storm at such a time? and why was the sky so yellow all the evening, aunt? it isn't natural.'

Mrs. Bramble gave a little impatient laugh.

- 'My good girl, I ain't anything of a weatherprophet, and I don't know why the sky was yellow or why the storm came. I suppose Providence sends storms when it sees fit, and makes the sky any colour it likes. But I can tell you one thing for certain: the sky wasn't yellow nor the storm didn't come because of your husband or anything about him. He ain't of quite so much importance as all that, I can assure you.'
- 'I didn't mean that,' said Janet; 'I only meant that when such strange things happen, people get

frightened—women do, and they think perhaps something is happening to those they care about. Robert don't deserve it of me; but I can't help thinking of him to-night. Aunt, do you think I could go to him?'

- 'Go to him? to-night? at this hour of the night?'
- 'Yes, aunt; it is not so very late. If I could just go and make sure that he was well-——'
- 'You silly goose! Of course you can't go at this hour of the night. Who is to go with you? and how could you get in there if you did go? and how do you know he is there? How do you know what sort of a welcome you would get if you saw him?'
 - 'I don't know; I dare say he wouldn't like it---'
- 'You may be sure he wouldn't. Go to bed, there's a good girl, and we'll talk it over in the morning.'
- 'I suppose that is the best thing to do,' Janet said despondently. 'I am sorry for troubling you, aunt; but I got so full of strange fancies, somehow.'
- 'Please, Janet, don't tell me of any strange fancies at this time of night; I don't want to be put from my sleep. I have something to do to-morrow, and I can't afford to lose my night's rest.'

Janet plaintively acknowledged the practical justice of this appeal, and she learned from the increasing acerbity of her aunt's tone of voice that it was time to bring the dialogue to a close. Mrs. Bramble was a thoroughly kind and good woman, but she had very little sympathy with people's fancies. She was an efficient woman, and much prided herself on her efficiency; and she was strongly of opinion that if people wanted to be of any use in the world, they had better not trouble themselves and their friends with such things as fancies.

Janet made no further remonstrance. But she did not go to bed or to sleep just then. She stood at the window and tried to peer into the wild night, and shuddered at every new roar of the wind and crash of the trees, and endeavoured to make out in what direction lay Bolingbroke Place, and wondered if Robert was there, and if he was sorry that she was not with him.

The wind certainly was blowing with peculiar ferocity and effect over Bolingbroke Place. It will be remembered that Bolingbroke Place consisted of one row of tall old decaying houses, with a long wall in front of them and another wall stopping up the thoroughfare at

Bolingbroke Place was, in fact, only a lane or a court, with a row of houses for one side and a dead wall for the other. The wall screened one of the drear old gardens of the institutions with which the region abounded, and now over this wall the wind was free to blow with all its might and main in the face of the row of houses. The house in which Charlton lived was the last in the row, and had therefore an unprotected side as well as an unprotected front. It was always a shaky and decaying old structure. The reader will perhaps remember the shuddering sensation which came over. Gabrielle the first time she turned into Bolingbroke Place and saw its grey and mournful old walls, with the gaunt doorways and the crumbling steps. The wind now made wild work among the chimney-pots and in and out of the corridors and along the rattling windowsashes of the forlorn old building. One need not have been very nervous to feel some alarm when with every fresh spasm of the storm the old house strained and shivered and creaked almost as much as a ship might in a mid-Atlantic gale. But the occupiers of the house were, for the most part, of the happy-go-lucky, or the unhappygo-unlucky, order, who did not trouble themselves much

with thinking what was likely to come next, but waited indifferently and let things take their way. It did not appear as if the fierceness of the storm much troubled Robert Charlton. No sound came from his rooms after he had locked himself in. Nor did Mr. Lefussis at first pay much attention to the raging of the gale and the rattling of the window-panes and sashes. He had something else to think of. He was at once working and dreaming. He was making preparations for his new career, and he was indulging in the most delightful fancies as to its His work of arranging and packing might successes. have been easily done, only that when he had made any arrangement complete as he thought, he instantly found that it was all wrong and had to be gone over again. What with this constant work of doing and undoing and his delicious dreams of future success, fame, and happiness, the hours passed away quickly enough. and he had not much leisure to think of the storm that raged outside, and indeed pervaded very palpably the howling corridors and the gusty chambers. In truth, Lefussis was not in Bolingbroke Place at all. He was away in soft islands amid languishing southern seas, where all manner of injustice had long been wrought on benign natives, and where he, Jasper Lefussis, had come to undo all the wrong and earn a monument more lasting than brass.

One tremendous rush of the wind, greater and fiercer than any that had gone before, startled Lefussis back to the substantial world of present London. all fierce gusts of wind in a city there are blended sounds that seem like cries of human agony and the crash of falling buildings, and Lefussis thought he heard some such sounds now. Could any chimney or gables have fallen near him? It was a terribly ancient and shaky quarter, he knew, in which Bolingbroke Place stood, and Bolingbroke Place was about the shakiest of all, and the particular house which held Lefussis he might have assumed to be the most rickety tenement of the whole region. Still, Lefussis was not thinking of that house; no one expects that anything is going to happen to the house he lives in. But when this tremendous roar of wind came. Lefussis felt the floor beneath him tremble and shake, and for a moment it occurred to him that the shock of an earthquake was passing over the place. But the loud, splitting, crashing sound was too near to be the echo of any faroff convulsion; and suddenly Lefussis saw to his horror that a wall before him was distinctly parting in two near its juncture with another wall. The first impression of humanity on seeing any entirely strange sight is to regard it as something quite in the ordinary course of things, and Lefussis must have gazed for a full second of time at the sundering wall before it occurred to him to think of the meaning of that portentous spectacle. Then he jumped to his feet and ran into the passage, crying out that the house was falling. He ran to the door of Charlton's room, and beat and kicked at it, and shouted to Charlton to get up, and he tried to drive in the door with might and main, but it was firmly locked inside, and he could not force it open; it seemed the one firm thing in all that tottering tenement. He found the passages now filled with excited people dressed, half-dressed, hardly dressed at all, making for the stairs and the street as for bare life. Giving one last and useless kick at Charlton's door, Lefussis ran downstairs too.

Some of the rooms in the house were fortunately unoccupied; and there were not many women or children there at any time. Bolingbroke-Place lodgers were usually

persons of somewhat ready and self-sufficing ways: and they were quick to get out of any difficulty with very little notice. The old house kept heaving and cracking a good deal before it finally collapsed. Rafters and beams were heard to snap, and volumes of antique dust poured forth on every side. Ancient wainscotings groaned and creaked, and at last broke up and sent affrighted rats scampering in whisking haste all over the crashing The inmates had good warning, therefore, and were some of them already out in the street, and some even in the square beyond, when the upper floors were heard to give way and to fall with a half-smothered crash like an avalanche whose voice is stifled in the new masses of snow which receive it in its descent. Everyone was safely out of the danger except Robert Charlton. In the confusion, not many thought of him; and when he was thought of, people were not even certain whether he was in the house at the time; everyone knew that he was out a great deal of nights lately; and although Lefussis had seen him in the evening, vet it was well known that it was not until a much later hour that he usually went out. It seemed at first, therefore, highly probable that he too had escaped the ruin.

Lefussis was able to say that although he had risked his own life by waiting to give the alarm to Charlton, and although he had knocked and kicked and shouted with an energy that might have wakened the famous Seven Sleepers themselves, he had not received any answer or heard the faintest sound of life stirring in Charlton's room. So it was set down for the moment as certain that Charlton too had escaped, and that no one had been harmed by the sudden fall of the house. For the house was down; the old tenement in Bolingbroke Place, where Gabrielle first met her lover, was a shapeless heap of unpicturesque ruins.

When the ruins came to be explored, it was found that Charlton had not escaped. But although his body was found buried beneath a mound of fallen masonry, it was not certain that he had died a victim to the accident. From a few evidences left behind him it was inferred by some that he had intended to kill himself that night with charcoal in the painless French fashion—his temperament always shrank from pain; but it was not certain whether he had accomplished his purpose in his own way, or had been anticipated by the storm and

the fall of the house. Lefussis was of opinion that Charlton had done the work, or at least was doing it, when he knocked and tried to save him; and that he was then too stupefied to answer, or else was actually dead. But he did not say much about this. It would be less painful for Janet and for others, he thought, if it were still possible to believe that Charlton was merely the victim of an accident; and for once Lefussis knew how to hold his tongue.

The death of Robert Charlton, it may be said at once, put a stop to any further proceedings in the matter of Paulina and her confession. Paulina was allowed to go her ways; nobody cared to punish her. She returned to the United States and took to the stage in New Orleans. She was generally understood to have some romantic story, people did not precisely know what; but it was assumed to have something to do with a secret marriage, a conspiracy, and the British aristocracy. There was a somewhat general impression that if she had her rights she would have been called Lady Paulina; and indeed some persons among her acquaintance did address her by that title,

and she did not reprehend them. Many biographies of her appeared in the Southern papers, the particulars of which were for the most part inexact. A mysterious halo of fame surrounded the Lady Paulina, and the Lady Paulina enjoyed it.

CHAPTER XV.

'FAREWELL, YE LOVERS; THE SWEET DAY IS YOURS.'

We may be allowed to turn back a few hours in the story. It is evening; and Clarkson and Gabrielle Fielding are alone in the grounds around Sir Wilberforce's house in the country. They had travelled down an easy run of a hundred miles or so, and found themselves now as far away from all associations of London as though they were in the heart of some far-off country. They had had all the singular beauty of the day during their journey; they seemed to have travelled away even from the promises of storm which had been brooding over London and were to be fulfilled at last. It is needless to say that they were very happy. Perhaps there was a certain sense of security in their happiness which is not given even to all true lovers. Each had peculiarities of character which marked the one as a

man, the other as a woman, unlike others. Clarkson Fielding knew perfectly well that he had found in Gabrielle the one woman whom he could love and live with, whom he could recognise as his appointed companion for life; and he knew that he would love her always as well as he knew that he would like sunshine and the summer always. To Gabrielle her love and her marriage came as a positive rescue from a life of which she was growing weary. A new life in the true sense was opening on her; a life of genuine deep love, and therefore, come what might, of happiness. The reality of the past seemed at its best but a dull dream and a mistake. Now for the first time she seemed to live and to have a motive for living.

The new life could not have begun more delightfully than among those ancient quiet trees in the evening. Clarkson had not seen the place for years, and it gave him great pleasure to go over it with Gabrielle now and to tell her of the many associations he had with this room and that, this path among the woods or the other. He was not without a certain penitential feeling as he went over the house in which he had been so mutinous and discontented, and he told

Gabrielle that there were many spots at which he felt inclined to stop and, after the example of Dr. Johnson, stand bareheaded for penance.

'The truth is, I was a terribly mutinous young fool, Gabrielle. I didn't like anything. Why I so hated the name of Clarkson then I can't imagine. Now, when you call me Clarkson, it sounds like music, Gabrielle.'

'Yes; but I suppose that is different,' Gabrielle said; and then she stopped, as if she had been saying something in her own praise.

'Well, it is rather different,' he said. 'And then, Gabrielle, think, after all, if I had not been so mutinous what might have happened. I should probably have never left my father's house—I should never have gone knocking about the world; I should have been a good boy here at home with Wilberforce, and then——'

'Yes, and then?'

Well, then I should probably never have gone to Bolingbroke Place; and I might never have seen you.

'Oh, but I don't think that would be possible,' Gabrielle said quite earnestly. 'I know we must have

met somewhere; I don't believe that things are left to chance like that.'

'Well, suppose we had met in some drawing-room somewhere, in the regular way. You wouldn't have felt the slightest interest in me; I never should have known poor Philip Vanthorpe, and you would never have mistaken me for him; and I should have had nothing to tell you which could have interested you in the least; and I should have been to you like any other young man.'

'At first, perhaps; but not after.'

'But there would only be the "at first;" for I should have had nothing to tell you which would have interested you and led on to any "after." You wouldn't have sent for me to your house and thought I was a poor artist of some kind, and tried to do me a good turn, and won my heart in that way——No, I don't mean that either, for I fell madly in love with you the moment I saw you on the steps at Bolingbroke Place. But you would never have given a second thought to me; and you would have fallen in love with someone else.'

'No; that could never have been,' Gabrielle said.

- 'If you and I had not met, I never should have cared for anyone on this earth. I should have led a lonely life, and gradually outlived all my illusions, and found that I could not do much in the world to make life worth having, and perhaps taken to ritualism in the end from merely not knowing what else to do with myself. Or I might have talked a pessimism all of my own making, like Claudia Lemuel.'
- 'I shall always celebrate as my birthday,' Fielding said, 'the day I first met you on the steps at Boling-broke Place.'
 - 'Do you know the exact day?' Gabrielle asked.
- 'Know it? I should think I did. I am not likely to forget it. I have marked it down in white in the calendar of my life. Know the exact day? Why, I began life on that day. I will tell you the date, Gabrielle, and you shall keep it as my birthday too.'
- 'You need not tell me the day,' Gabrielle said, blushing slightly. 'I know it.'
- 'I love Bolingbroke Place,' Fielding said, 'and yet I don't want to see it any more.'
- 'Nor I. I never wished to see it after that last day when we saw her there. I only want it to live in my

memory now as it once was. I said farewell to it that last day, hoping never to see it again.'

They indulged in a good deal of such speculation as they lounged under the trees. Do lovers newly married really talk much about their love? I am inclined to think they do not; that they are somewhat shy and timid in their new relationship; and that only by little occasional glimpses do they come upon the one great theme that occupies the heart of each. Gabrielle and Fielding did not talk a great deal about their love in direct words that evening; they touched upon it, for the most part, by indirect allusion, by reference to this day and that, this event and that, which bore upon their fate. A certain tender reticence, perhaps, was most truly consistent with happiness like theirs and temperaments like theirs. Now and then some halfarticulate, wholly irrepressible expression of emotion would testify to the reality of youth and the fervour of love; but in truth the things we feel most deeply seldom get spoken in this world. Besides, each knew what the other felt; words could not have made it more clear.

While they were loitering through Wilberforce's

woods and gardens, a telegram from Wilberforce himself was brought to Clarkson. It contained some important news.

- 'Need not think of going to New Orleans. Woman Vanthorpe has confessed her whole story a plot. Don't trouble about this, and don't come back. Time enough; only I thought you would like to know. Will write tomorrow.'
- 'She became repentant,' Gabrielle exclaimed. 'I thought that would be so. I don't think she had a bad heart, after all.'

Fielding did not say a word to disturb Gabrielle's charitable belief. But he did not himself believe that the confession had been brought about by pure repentance. He thought it much more likely that someone who had been concerned in the plot with Paulina had proved untrustworthy or seemed likely to do so, and that Paulina had found it convenient, for some reason or other, to anticipate a revelation. It was, however, a great relief to him to think that there would be no necessity for him to begin his married life by an expedition to New Orleans, and he readily undertook to promise to Gabrielle that so far as it was in his power he would

endeavour to prevent any punishment from falling on Paulina. He was not by any means satisfied that to make such a promise was acting the part of a truly good citizen and a public-spirited man. He greatly doubted whether Solon or Socrates would have consented to such a leniency towards the wrongdoer; but at the moment he thought a good deal more of the happiness of Gabrielle than of Solon or Socrates.

- 'Very good. We will leave her,' Fielding said gravely, 'to the vengeance of Heaven, as they used to do in the old-fashioned dramas when it was time for the curtain to come down, and it was not thought cheerful to have anyone killed.'
- 'Her own conscience,' said Gabrielle emphatically, 'will be her sufficient punishment.'
- 'Yes,' Fielding answered. 'I dare say; oh yes—exactly.'
- 'Under such conditions of education and life,' Gabrielle pleaded, 'we might have been all like her.'
- 'Well, no,' he answered, 'I think not. I think we should have been a little more true to our comrades, Gabrielle, you and I, even if we had been brought up in the slums.'

'But you don't know that she has not been true to anyone now. She has only accused herself.'

'Ah, yes, quite true,' Fielding said; and he dropped the subject. He would not at such a time communicate to Gabrielle the suspicions which were in his mind with regard to Paulina and her penitence.

Among the many sources of satisfaction which they had in the conditions of their new life was the fact that they were not on the most cordial terms with Mrs. Leven, and that they were not therefore supposed to render to her any manner of account concerning the life which they might resolve to lead. For the wisdom of the world and its respectabilities Clarkson and Gabrielle had marvellously little reverence, and they were quite resolved to live their own lives. But it was something of a relief to be free from the trouble of answering friendly remonstrances on the subject. As yet they had not any definite idea of what sort of life they were to lead, or even where it was to be led; and they put aside the merely practical part of the subject. They were determined to have their holiday to the very full of its enjoyment.

The house stood well on the side of a hill, and on the side looking southward; the greater part of the woods and grounds were on the other side. As Gabrielle and Fielding now stood in front of the house, they could see over a vast extent of country stretching away to the south. Below in the hollow, almost as it seemed at their feet, ran a brook that served as a boundary on that side to Wilberforce's demesne. lovers stood a moment in silence and enjoyed the quiet beauty of the scene, and allowed its influence to steal upon them and to become part of their sensations and of their happiness. The ripple of the stream itself seemed to blend in with their thoughts and to be a part of the delight of their lives and of the dreams of their future. Sunset and a rippling stream will come up to the consciousness of this pair for ever after when they think of the opening of a happy married life. It will be inseparable from the thought, as a certain strain of music or the scent of some flower is from many of our associations. For awhile they were silent. Gabrielle leaned upon his arm and they looked southward.

After a time, the attention of both became attracted

by the strange appearance of the clouds that were piled up far away to the south.

All over the sky, except to the south and at this particular point, there was a peculiar clearness and bright-The heavens were slightly purpling with the descent of evening, but there were hardly any clouds even at the west, where the sun would soon begin to sink. Only at the south, low down and forming a dense mass, were the yellow sulphurous clouds. They were so piled up and pressed together that they looked like some solid material object; like an irregular wall of yellow hills breaking the horizon line. A traveller on some broad plain in other latitudes sometimes does thus see on the horizon a yellow mountainrange suddenly rise alone and awful; and is impressed with a shuddering sensation, the sight is seemingly so unreal and yet is so real. At first, perhaps, he thinks he is but looking on a cloud-heap, and it is only after a while he feels convinced that it is a mountain-range. As Gabrielle and Clarkson looked southward each was for a moment inclined to think that the tawny mass was a hill of some kind, so fixed and solid did it seem; and only after some few moments of steady gazing did



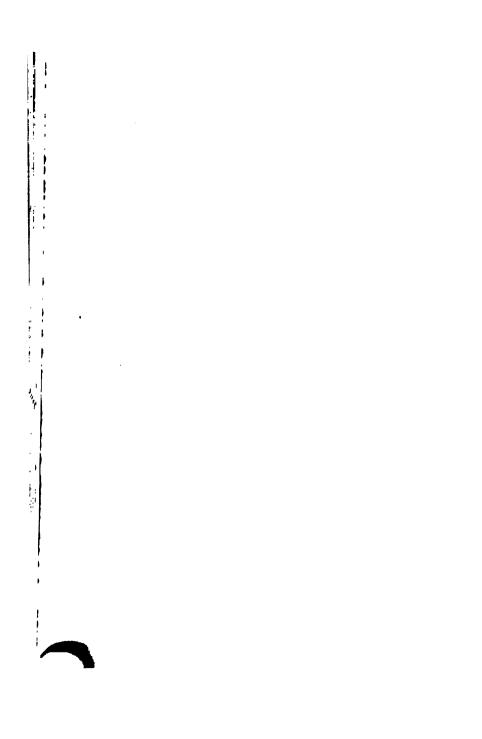
' For awhile they were silent."



' For awhile they were silent."



· For awhile they were shoul.



it become certain that no solid body was there, but a gathering of sulphur-coloured clouds. There was scarcely any motion or change perceptible while they looked. The rack did not dislimb. Gabrielle and Fielding stood in silence for a while, the eyes of each fixed on the same spot in the sky.

'How strange these masses of yellow clouds look! At the south, are they not?' Gabrielle said.

'At the south? yes; they seem to be over London,' Fielding answered. 'They tell of a coming storm. I know that look in the sky very well; but it is uncommon in these latitudes. It means a downright regular tropical sort of storm. We are out of it, Gabrielle; it is not coming our way. We have escaped from it. Come, is not that ominous of our future? So lovely, so divine a morning for our marriage; and then we get into the train and are carried away from the regions of the storm and brought safely down here. An omen! yes, an omen! I accept it.'

'But I hope there will be no harm done in London,' Gabrielle said anxiously. 'Will it be a great storm really, I wonder? I hope no harm will come to anyone we know.'

It seemed strange to think of harm happening to anyone as they stood in that sheltered and beautiful place. Fielding watched with absorbing interest the sudden look of anxiety on Gabrielle's face. It seemed to him so characteristic of her singularly unselfish nature. In the midst of her own new happiness she must stop to think of the chances of others who were not so happy, or who might be in danger. 'Are there many such women?' he asked himself as he looked into her eyes, 'or is there only one; and if so, by what strange chance is she given to me?'

'It will be nothing,' he said, soothing her. 'What is a storm in England? only a heavy shower of rain and a few chimney-pots blown down. I don't even know that that mass of clouds is really over London; only it is in the direction of London; and I thought somehow to-day, as we came down, that we seemed to be travelling out of the path of a storm. I confess I was selfish enough to be glad of it, Gabrielle: it looked so auspicious an omen. Let the storm come. Let it fall on Locksley Hall, as the egotistic lover says: he doesn't care what comes of Locksley Hall, once he is out of the place. Well, lovers are egotistic, disappointed or

happy. I can't help feeling something of the same kind. Let it fall on Bolingbroke Place, if it will; it won't do much harm, I dare say.'

'No; I suppose no great harm comes of a storm in England. Still, the bare idea of anyone, perhaps, who is alive and happy now, being harmed or killed by something that seems trifling to us here—well, the truth is I am too happy, and my only trouble now is because I know there are others not so happy; that there are sad hearts; that there are eyes wet with tears of grief, while mine, my friend—I can't look up—are wet with tears of happiness.'

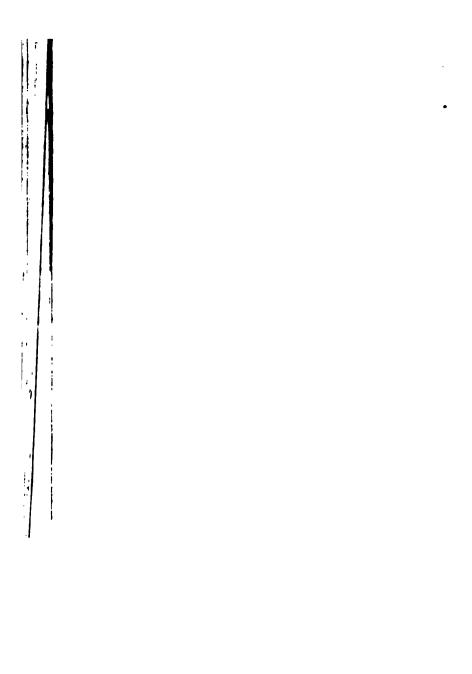
'Let us sit down here for a moment,' he said.

There was a wooden seat near them and they sat down, and she leaned on him, and for a while they were silent. Then they began to talk again. They talked of their plans and prospects, and of the future and the past, in low tones suited to the place and the hour and the conditions of their new life. They spoke of what was to be done with the money that Fielding would not accept and Gabrielle would not keep, and had many ideas about the way in which some good might most surely be made to come of it. Gabrielle

was resolved to do something—she did not exactly know what—to make Janet Charlton happy. remembered afterwards the curious fact that neither mentioned the name of Robert Charlton. In truth, both Gabrielle and Fielding had a conviction somehow that things were hopelessly wrong with Charlton, and each shrank from the intrusion of his name into the dreams and schemes of such an hour. went over all the events of their past, according to the immemorial custom of lovers: the 'don't you remember' this day, that day, and the other; the times they met, the words they spoke, before either knew that the other loved; and the rest of the sweet purposeless talk which all the world talks when it is young and in love. Let us leave them to their love and their happiness, with the evening song of the birds and the soft murmur of the trees, and the ripple of the water; with the future bright before them, and the past endeared; let us leave them there and go our several ways.

THE END.







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